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THE DOUBLE IMAGE

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PRELIMINARIES

IF THIS WERE A LONGER BOOK, IT SHOULD carry two Introductions. The first, addressed to the gentlemen on my left, would plead that in order to deal properly with an adversary it is necessary to take him seriously. The second, addressed to the gentlemen on my right, would argue that, if their beliefs are sound, they have nothing to fear from the inspection of a curious outsider. On the whole, I am more apprehensive of interruptions from the right. And so let me say to both parties at once that this book is not intended either to disturb anybody's faith or to propagate a Christian and therefore in many eyes a retrogressive or 'reactionary' attitude to society, the life of the individual, philosophy or the natural sciences. Although it may at times appear a little heavy, it is in intention a good-tempered, a light-hearted, a strictly neutral and perhaps a trivial book. Those who care for that kind of thing will find a general theory of sorts in Chapter Four. Like other theories, this one would lead to disaster if it were taken too far. I have made no attempt to stabilise it in a set of terms or to apply it in a detailed fashion in the chapters which precede and follow it. My purpose has not been to prove anything but simply to exhibit certain facts which I have noticed and which have interested me in the course of my reading in a group of mainly French Catholic writers of our time. Here and there I have suggested an explanation for these facts, if not indeed two or three explanations mutually contradicting each other. But this is from beginning to end merely a book of literary criticism. Theology enters into it because theology entered into the books with which it deals. I am not fundamentally concerned with the truth or otherwise of doctrines. Certainly, 'myth' and 'mythology' are the last words that any Christian wishes to hear spoken in connection with his religion. And so to my Christian readers I will say, 'When you read the word

“myth”, substitute the word “mystery” in your own mind, and we shall both be happier’. In the official sense, I am not a practising Christian. I am assured that I was baptized in a Wesleyan Methodist chapel, and military documents described me for, at any rate, four and a half years as an ‘agnostic’. But there is a sense in which every European is a practising Christian. Even the Germans have not succeeded in wiping the slate of the mind clean of its Christian attitudes and dispositions. The European languages are of Christian formation. Our codes of law, our domestic customs, are Christian. The modern world has not yet found a new centre for itself. Until it does, this is still a Christocentric world, and Europe is Christendom. In that sense, I am very much, and more consciously than some of my co-religionists, a practising Christian.

This, I am afraid, will not disarm the gentlemen on my right. Catholics in particular have a number of bye-laws prohibiting the intrusion of a literary critic upon the territory of religious faith. What must surely have been the most exhilarating literary controversy to take place in an English periodical during the present century arose from the attempt made by Mr. J. Middleton Murry, at that time content to be a critic, to broach the possibility that the terminology of Kant might be more apt than that of St. Thomas Aquinas to describe the mental and imaginative situation of our time. This controversy took place in *The Criterion* in 1927. Murry’s article was called ‘Towards a Synthesis’. Those who took part included MM. Charles Mauron and Ramon Fernandez, Mr. T. S. Eliot, Mr. Herbert Read, Mr. T. Sturge Moore and the Rev. Fr. M. C. D’Arcy, S.J. It was the kind of thing that is normally lacking in English cultural life, but which the people of less sheepish nations frequently enjoy. In general, the outcry was that a literary critic had not the ‘discipline’ necessary for the discussion of metaphysical and theological questions, and yet it is these same scholastics, with their water-tight disciplines, who are the first, on other occasions, to cry out against modern specialisation and departmentalism. Fr. D’Arcy, hitting below the belt as I

fear I have known him do even with his co-religionists (I remember against him directorial hints of 'mental strain' thrown at Eric Gill ten years later), said, 'I am sorry Mr. Murry is not more of a philosopher. There are present in his essay all those fascinating generalisations which bestrew the pages of the literary critic who is interested in philosophy. I know quite well that Mr. Murry tries to be exact, he is careful when he is conscious he should be careful, and I do wish he had been conscious more often.' Well, in this essay too, there are present all those fascinating generalisations which bestrew the pages of the literary critic who is interested in philosophy. At least, I hope they are fascinating. I have tried to be exact. I have been careful when I was conscious I should be careful.

The attention of those disposed to take up the challenge, however, is first called to a curious document attributed with reasonable confidence to St. John of the Cross, which I may as well print in full.

CENSURE AND JUDGMENT OF THE BLESSED FATHER ON
THE SPIRIT AND METHOD OF PRAYER OF ONE OF
THE NUNS OF HIS ORDER

In the kind of affective prayer practised by this soul, there seem to be five defects, so that I cannot consider her spirit to be good. The first is, that she has a great fondness for her own way: and a true spirit practises great detachment from all desire. The second is, that she is too confident, and has too little fear of delusions; the spirit of God is never without fear, in order, as the wise man saith, to keep a soul from sin (Prov. xv, 27). The third is, that she wishes to persuade people into the belief that she is in a good and high state: this is not the fruit of a true spirit: for that, on the contrary, would wish to be lightly esteemed, and despised, and does despise itself. The fourth and the chief is, that the fruits of humility are not visible which, when the graces—as she says here—are real, are ordinarily never communicated to the soul without first undoing and annihilating it in an anterior abasement of humility. Now, if they had wrought that effect in her, she could not fail to say something, or rather a good deal, about it; because the first subjects that would suggest themselves to her to speak about, and make much of, are the fruits of humility; and these in their operations are so effectual that it is impossible to dissemble them. Though they are not equally observable in all the dealings of God, yet these, which he calls union, are never found without them. Because

a soul is humbled before it is exalted (Prov. xviii, 12); and 'it is good for me that Thou hast humbled me' (Psalm cxviii, 71). The fifth is, that the style and language she uses do not seem to me those of the spirit she refers to; for that spirit teaches a style which is more simple, free from affectation, and exaggeration: and such is not the one before me. All this that she says: God spoke to me: I spoke to God: seems nonsense.

What I would say is this: she should not be required nor permitted to write anything on these matters: and her confessor should not seem to hear of them willingly, except to disparage and set aside what she has to say. Let her superiors try her in the practice of virtue only, particularly in that of contempt of self, humility, and obedience; and then at the sound of this blow will come forth that gentleness of soul in which graces so great have been wrought. These tests must be sharp, for there is no evil spirit that will not suffer a good deal for his own credit.

Are these not precisely the methods of literary criticism?

For my own application of those methods I am of course solely responsible. And the subject-matter of the four principal studies has involved me in a number of difficulties, the chief of which is the limited availability of the texts in English or for that matter in French. This is particularly marked in the case of Claudel, though I dare say it will be a long time before the whole of Mauriac's output is in the bookshops either. In the case of these two, therefore, I have felt bound to do a good deal of mere description and synopsis. In the case of Claudel, the bibliographical details are reasonably complete. That this is bound to make Chapters Three and Six less attractive to those already familiar with the work of Mauriac and Claudel, I shall readily admit.

I have similarly compromised in the matter of quotation. From a learned point of view, it is clearly best to quote only in the original tongue. From the point of view of the general reader, it is clearly best to quote only in English. I have in fact quoted in both. I have quoted in English when it seemed to me that little or nothing would be lost. I have similarly referred to books by their English titles wherever an English translation exists.

Parts of the book have previously appeared in *Horizon*, *Orion*, *Partisan Review* (U.S.A.), *The Kenyon Review* (U.S.A.),

Phoenix (U.S.A.) and *Our Time*. To the editors of these periodicals, I make the customary acknowledgement. Among French authorities, I am particularly indebted to Louis Chaigne's biographical studies of Mauriac and Claudel in *Vies et Œuvres d'écrivains*, and I have drawn liberally upon the files of the *Nouvelle Revue Française* from 1935 to 1940. More privately, I am indebted to M. Wladimir Weidlé for information, for the loan of books and for his pencilled annotation of the Claudel chapters. In order that my incidental praise of M. Weidlé shall not seem incidental to a private treaty of mutual admiration, I ought therefore to say that I began by knowing nothing of M. Weidlé but the one article and that, after I had praised him, I wrote to Jean Paulhan asking who M. Weidlé was, whether he were still alive and in France and if possible to be put in touch with him. I am therefore also indebted to M. Paulhan. The recognised authority on Claudel is M. Jacques Madaule. Anybody lucky enough to possess the two volumes of correspondence between Jacques Rivièrē and Alain Fournier will find in them a wonderfully sensitive impression of the impact of Claudel upon his own generation.

Chapter One

TWO NOVELS BY LÉON BLOY

THE LITERARY FUNCTION OF THE CATHOLIC

The faith in the nineteenth century was to provide occasions for blasphemy. On the level of ordinary life, we may broadly accept the Marxist view and see in continental Catholicism no more than a conservative ideology. We must not presume that the blasphemies uttered self-consciously by Baudelaire, Rimbaud and (on the smaller scale of this predominantly Calvinist country) Lionel Johnson and Oscar Wilde were wholly devoid of genuine anguish. Nevertheless, the general literary trend was to use the Catholic faith and its trappings as so many holy objects to be amusingly profaned by the *enfant terrible*. Profanation was a theatrical effect. This is clearest of all in Baudelaire. The juxtaposition of the sacred and the sordid was his life's work and the basis of his poetic achievement. Such juxtaposition for effect had taken place spasmodically in all romantic poetry. It is present in Goethe's *Faust*. The romantic movement was very largely a prolonged Witches' Sabbath. But Baudelaire isolated and completed the trick. Baudelaire's disgust extended even to the trick itself. After him, blasphemy became less and less amusing because even the emotional nucleus of belief had gone. The romantic movement petered out in Huysmans and Barbey d'Aurevilly, Baron Corvo and Thornton Wilder, Jean de Bosschère and the Rev. Montague Summers, and its last productions verge closer and closer on pornography.

Four writers restored the Catholic faith in England and France. They were John Henry Newman and Gerard Manley Hopkins, Charles Péguy and Léon Bloy. Catholic stage-properties had never quite vanished from the literary scene, but there had been no belief. For the first time in a hundred years, four great writers believed. Even in Italy, no major literary figure had believed since Manzoni, and Manzoni,

though he lived till 1873, had reached the peak of his achievement in the century's first quarter.

The restoration of Catholic belief produced quite different effects in England and in France. In England, where there had been no vast inert mass of *bien-pensants*, Catholicism very quickly became smart. The main pleasure of English Catholic publicists like Monsignor Ronald Knox, Arnold Lunn and their younger colleagues lies in demonstrating how muddle-headed other people's thinking is, how imprecise their terms and their intentions. This movement is partly counterbalanced by the sentimental medievalism of Chesterton and Gill, but even Chesterton was a great one for proving that nothing is new under the sun. In France, where imprecision of thought had never been the most obvious sign of the secular or indeed the anti-clerical mind, similar antics and grimaces were scarcely possible. In France, the renewal of belief involved in the first place a denunciation of the nominally Catholic bourgeoisie for its tepidity and for its material acquisitiveness. Thus the *renouveau spirituel* was by no means a movement of political reaction. Péguy never quite knew whether he was primarily a Catholic or primarily a socialist. Léon Bloy delivered the whole weight of his massive eloquence against *les bien-pensants*, against what he calls *la bondieuserie sulpicienne*, against the rich and against bourgeois mediocrity. As a great many of us remember with gratitude, Jacques Maritain and Georges Bernanos stuck out for the simple facts of the matter during the Spanish insurrection of General Franco, when the English Catholics were almost unanimously crying crusade.

The forms in which Catholic intellectuals have chosen to express themselves have similarly varied between the two countries. England produced a major Catholic poet, and since then Catholic intellectuals in this country have contented themselves with general pronouncements and wireless talks. In Graham Greene, we have a novelist of distinction who also happens to be a Catholic, but that he can be regarded as a Catholic novelist in the same sense as François Mauriac and Georges Bernanos is very much open to question,

though in *The Power and the Glory* he for once attempted the Bernanos manner and though in a recent issue of *La France Libre* he pays respectful homage to Mauriac. On the other hand, in France, Mauriac and Bernanos, novelists, are two of the four unquestionably dominant Catholic writers, the third (Claudel) being a poet and dramatist and only the fourth (Maritain) a publicist.

The French Catholic novel of to-day was initiated single-handed by Léon Bloy. This will of itself perhaps explain Bloy's own rather exiguous and frequently confused achievement in the form. For he wrote but two novels, and as a novelist neither of them is fully satisfying. Yet it is as a novelist that he should be regarded, because of the trend of his influence and because his writing outside the form of the novel also has a narrative and dramatic rather than an ideological movement.

One of the two novels, *The Woman who was Poor*,¹ exists in English translation. Of an œuvre of some forty books, the only other to be found in English is *Letters to his Fiancée*.² These two were published by Messrs. Sheed and Ward in 1937, and neither sold. A number of translated extracts from *Exégèse des Lieux communs* had previously appeared in Bernard Wall's short-lived *Colosseum* in 1935, together with the translation of a pamphlet on Bloy by Maritain. Karl Pfleger's *Wrestlers with Christ* (1936) contains an essay on Bloy, and there were some notes on him by Richard Kehoe, O.P., in *Blackfriars* for January 1936. That seems to be the English total. In France, numerous books have been devoted to Bloy. On my own shelves, which are by no means those of a specialist, I find five, by Pierre Termier, Léopold Levaux, Hubert Colleye, Stanislas Fumet and Ernest Seillière.³ I believe that before the war there was even a quarterly of Bloy studies under the title *Les Cahiers Léon Bloy*. Jacques Maritain is a convert and godson of Bloy's. In his opinion, Bloy wrote the finest French prose since Bossuet.

¹ *La Femme pauvre*.

² *Lettres à sa fiancée*. These were also the first to be published in German.

³ A birth centenary vol. by Albert Béguin has now appeared in translation.

LE DÉSÉSPÉRÉ (1887) HAS AT LEAST ONE OF THE technical virtues of a good novel. Its themes are unambiguously present on the first page. There is no prolonged clearing of the throat. The novel opens with the hero, Caïn Marchenoir (Bloy himself), writing a letter to Alexis Dulaurier (Bourget? Huysmans?) to ask for money with which to bury his father who is just about to die of horror at his son's violent and improvident ways. 'I am writing to you,' says Marchenoir, 'because a soul given over to its own nothingness is without other recourse than to the futile literary gymnastic feat of formulating that nothingness.' What did Marchenoir *père* represent? Mediocrity. Is Dulaurier the constant friend of Marchenoir's misery? No. Marchenoir despises him. His reason for writing to Dulaurier is that Dulaurier has a lot of money which he does not deserve. Marchenoir-Bloy characterised himself elsewhere (it is the title of one of his eight diaries) as 'the ungrateful beggar'. Part One of *Le Désespéré* proceeds to the narration of Dulaurier's successful but unedifying literary career and his condescending ill-treatment of Marchenoir. Follows a retrospective account of Marchenoir's early life, his sudden conversion 'durant l'oisive chaufferie de pieds d'une nuit de grand'garde, en 1870', his struggles to gain a footing in the post-war literary world, a series of extremely unattractive love-affairs and the discovery of Véronique. Marchenoir *père* dies and is buried at Périgueux. His son receives money from a devoted friend, an engraver, Leverdier, and goes to the Grande Chartreuse to make a retreat.

This narrative follows Bloy's own life-story closely. Born in 1846 and a pauper for the greater part of his life, Bloy was in fact the recipient of some form of mystical illumination in the night watches during the war of 1870. He was, in fact, born at Périgueux, and his inability to force a living out of journalism was not entirely due to his own intransigence, though Barbey d'Aurevilly and Ernest Hello befriended him. Bloy had his period of debauchery. 'Il avait été chaste à la manière des prisonniers et des matelots, lesquels ne voient ordinairement dans l'amour qu'une désirable friction malpropre, en l'obscurité de

coûteux repaires.' He subsequently 'fit de l'amour extatique dans des lits de boue, avec une conscience dilatée'. Upon the death of his father, Bloy made a retreat at the Trappist monastery of Soligny and entertained the monastic life as a possibility for himself. He did not like the Trappists and substituted for Soligny, in his novel, the Grande Chartreuse, where he later made a happier retreat. But the chief divergence from autobiographical fact in Part One is found when we come to Véronique. And here, dealing with the most lacerating episode of his own life, Bloy fails conspicuously. The story as it is told in the novel is dramatically inferior to the episode as it in fact took place.

The Véronique of real life was called Anne-Marie Roulet. Like the Véronique of the novel (though with less domestic and financial excuse), she was a prostitute. Under the influence of Bloy, she began to exhibit symptoms of sanctity and illumination and recounted to Bloy visions and prophecies which underlie a great deal of his work. In the end, she went mad. She was Bloy's mistress for a time. The most heroic moral feat of Bloy's life was the breaking of sexual relationship with Anne-Marie Roulet while maintaining the closest religious and spiritual (or psychological) intimacy with her. In the novel, Marchenoir contrives to redeem Véronique without sleeping with her. It is too easy. Véronique falls in love with Marchenoir. He converts by denying her. This is reminiscent of the cut-and-dried psychology of Paul Bourget, of which Bloy was frequently contemptuous. The truth was in this case more interesting. In Part One of *Le Désespéré*, there is no sufficient conflict.

Part Two covers the period of a religious retreat at the Grande Chartreuse. Letters are exchanged between Marchenoir and Véronique which indicate that Marchenoir, having established his lack of a vocation for the religious life, is falling in love with Véronique, but that the process torments him.

Upon his return to Paris, in Part Three, Marchenoir is confronted with one of the most ludicrous and shocking situations in world-fiction. Leverdier relates to his friend how Véronique, in order to prevent Marchenoir falling in love with her, has cut off her hair (which hung to her knees), has

sold 'the hair (to a taxidermist ?) and, with the proceeds, has gone to a Jew of doubtful occupation and paid him to pull out all her teeth. ' *A cet énoncé inouï, Marchenoir tourna sur lui-même et, s'éloignant obliquement, à la façon d'un aliéné, les deux bras croisés sur sa tête, se mit à exhaler des rauquements horribles.*' And well he might. Bloy's refusal to present his sainted harlot as she was has involved him in the most dreadful plight, coupled as it is with a serious lack of humour. Véronique in the novel is not mad (she becomes so quite unexpectedly in the last few pages), yet she does what could only not be ludicrous in a mad woman. Of the real Anne-Marie Roulet, just before she became really high, the incident of the teeth could have been recounted and would have seemed credible. In Véronique, it is presented by Bloy as a further symptom of great character, perhaps indeed as a direct result of the influx of supernatural grace (and let us remember that Bloy was forty years old when he wrote *Le Désespéré*). But of this extraordinary silliness in Bloy, we shall find other, though less glaring, instances.

The extraction of Véronique's teeth solves none of Marchenoir's problems. It enables him to rail further at the mediocrity of priests, one of whom, Véronique's director, ticks her off severely, failing to appreciate the sublimity of her action. But in the end Marchenoir concludes that Véronique, without teeth and hair, is not less, but more, beautiful. He becomes increasingly amorous of her, and yet the two continue to inhabit the same apartment in the same odd condition of *concubinage céleste*. Working at his book on the divine symbolism of history one night, Marchenoir loses control of himself and staggers, with endless *grincements* and panting, to Véronique's door, only to find that she has been praying all night. This cools him off. When Véronique does in the end go mad, Marchenoir is run over on the way back from the asylum. The novel concludes, as it began, with a letter, this time to Leverdier, the constant friend, who is in the country. Marchenoir dies without priest. He dies, like his father, of mediocrity, but of other people's mediocrity and not his own. He also dies of poverty, the superlative crime.

I have tried in this summary neither to simplify facetiously

nor to extenuate the naïveté and clumsiness of *Le Désespéré*. What cannot be made plain in a summary is how little the quality of the book depends upon its plot. It is the flow of metaphysical fantasy which keeps the book going. The incidents hold it up. Unfortunately, Marchenoir's professional difficulties also hold it up. Parts Four and Five consist almost wholly of two episodes in the literary world, first a party given by Properce Beauvivier¹ who wishes to give Marchenoir a build-up for his own purposes and, second, Marchenoir's attempt to start a magazine (*Bloy's own Le Pal*, of which four numbers appeared). How culpable are the mandarins of the day is a matter on which successful and unsuccessful writers differ. Certainly there are literary vested interests, and certainly a number of writers in any age fall foul of them, and certainly Bloy should not have been allowed to starve as he did. Nevertheless his railing was inaccurate, uncharitable and a waste of his own time. The passages in *Le Désespéré* which are of unquestionable excellence are certain descriptions of the Grande Chartreuse, the account of Marchenoir's (*Bloy's own*) conversion and some briefer dogmatic-exegetical rhapsodies on Christ the Poor Man, the central figure in Bloy's general mythology.

The prose at its best is magnificent. In its colour and its rhetorical weight, it is un-French. In its dependence upon epithet it is wholly French. Bloy characterises his own writing in that of Marchenoir and speaks of 'la violente couleur de l'écrivain, sa barbarie cauteleuse et alambiquée ; l'insistance giratoire, l'enroulement tête de certaines images cruelles revenant avec obstination sur elles-mêmes comme les convolvulacées ; l'audace inouïe de cette forme, nombreuse autant qu'une horde et si rapide, quoique pesamment armée ; le tumulte sage de ce vocabulaire panaché de flammes et de cendres ainsi que le Vésuve aux derniers jours de Pompéi, balafré d'or, incrusté, crénelé, denticulé de gemmes antiques,

¹ It is always very difficult to identify the literary figures whom Bloy introduces into his novels, because he hated every big name of his day and always for the same reasons. However, he felt a particular fury against Bourget, Huysmans and Louis Veuillot, and one or all three of these is probably contained in any of the lay figures he dresses up.

à la façon d'une cbâsse de martyr ; mais surtout l'élargissement prodigieux qu'un pareil style conférait soudain à la moins ambitieuse des thèses, au postulat le plus infime et le plus acclimaté.' Of the writer's function he says elsewhere, 'Il ne reste plus que l'Art. Un art proscrit, il est vrai, méprisé, subalternisé, famélique, fugitif, guenilleux et catacombal. Mais, quand même, c'est l'unique refuge pour quelques âmes altissimes condamnées à traîner leur souffrante carcasse dans les charogneux carrefours du monde.' I think it was Laura Riding who clearly laid down that French is the language of the adjective, as German of the noun and English of exact meaning. Certainly these passages could not be translated into English without rendering some of the epithets by elaborate clauses.

THE WOMAN WHO WAS POOR (1897) IS SHORTER, less purely autobiographical, less unrelievedly gloomy and more skilful than *Le Désespéré*. Its digressions are more pertinent and at the same time more quotable. The first part of the book displays even a sense of humour, and a moral situation of the kind later developed by François Mauriac is clearly present. Marchenoir, who died at the end of *Le Désespéré*, reappears (and dies again) in *The Woman who was Poor*, but he is not the central figure. His place is taken by a new avatar of Anne-Marie Roulet, this time given the name of Clotilde Maréchal. Only at the beginning of the book is she placed in a setting resembling that of the real-life Anne-Marie. She does not go mad. She does not live in *concubinage céleste* with Marchenoir. On the contrary, she marries a friend of Marchenoir, a book-illustrator and man of action, Léopold (Bloy himself had begun his career as an illuminator). It is as though Bloy, himself now married to Jeanne Molbech, daughter of a Danish poet, and in a sunnier phase of his own life, were reviving Anne-Marie in order to enquire how she would have fared if she had known men less bitterly uncompromising than himself and if she had had a chance of happiness. At the same time, extreme poverty is still the climate, and there is still a good deal of railing (but in a more detached

and satirical vein) against the successful literary figures of the time. Léopold is killed rescuing victims of the great fire at the Opéra Comique, over which, when it occurred in 1887, Bloy had expressed jubilation because so many of the four hundred victims were rich. It was to him a sign of the wrath to come, '*un léger souffle de la respiration de ton Dieu*'. God he now saw not only as 'The Poor Man' but also as 'He who burns', and he records with infinite satisfaction that '*l'asphyxie ou la crémation des bourgeois immondes*' should have supervened upon '*l'abjecte musique de M. Ambroise Thomas*'. Clotilde survives and prays, a little like the widow in Mauriac's *Le Baiser au lépreux*.

The opening of the book could have been written by Zola and would have done credit to Céline, Louis Guilloux or any contemporary *misérabiliste*. It is perhaps the only occasion on which Bloy truly envisaged an objective situation, and it makes quite plain that Bloy's comparative failure as a novelist was not due to lack of the specific gift, but simply to obsession and temperamental overcharge. We are presented to the crapulous Chapuis, Clotilde's step-father, and to Clotilde's mother. They have had money and lost it. Chapuis drinks and makes advances to his step-daughter, whose mother adores him. Clotilde herself has on one occasion succumbed to a young man's importunities, out of boredom and curiosity. She is now thirty, of pure life and as deeply possessed of a religious 'secret' as the heroine of Bernanos' *La Joie*, for whom she was perhaps the model. Alas, this solidly created atmosphere is quickly dispelled by one of Bloy's obsessions.

Chapuis finds Clotilde work as an artist's model and sends her to the jovial, Rabelaisian Pélopidas Gacougnol who turns out to be a sheep in wolf's clothing. That Clotilde would have disliked undressing in order to pose for an artist is likely enough. Unfortunately, Bloy not only approves of her scruples but maintains them in person with such vehemence that he is reduced in the end to saying that to pose nude is worse than prostitution. This lengthy digression is the book's chief flaw, for it is not even particularly interesting in itself. Omit it, and the story continues to evolve realistically for

another twenty or thirty pages. Gacognol is engaged in an argument when Clotilde arrives. He tells her briefly to undress and continues his argument. When his visitor has gone to the accompaniment of shouting and recrimination, Clotilde is heard to be sobbing behind the screen. She is on her knees, having removed but one piece of clothing. Gacognol is at once sympathetic, decides that he can use his model clothed as a Christian martyr in the arena and takes her off to the Jardin des Plantes to sketch lions. Here they meet Marchenoir, and the day peters out in conversation.

There is one more good realistic scene when Clotilde's mother comes round in tears to blackmail Gacognol, who has bestowed Clotilde in lodgings of her own. From this point, *The Woman who was Poor* ceases to be a novel and becomes a *récit* (using the distinction as it is made by Ramon Fernandez) in which the narrative is but a vehicle for the presentation of Bloy's dominant theme, holy and persecuted poverty. Yet having dragged his characters through every kind of accepted misfortune, Bloy concludes by saying in the person of Clotilde, '*Il n'y a qu'une tristesse . . . c'est de N'ÊTRE PAS DES SAINTS*', and indeed a little earlier Clotilde has said, '*Tout ce qui arrive est adorable*'.

EXCEPT FOR A FEW MONTHS AFTER COMMITTING Anne Marie Roulet to the lunatic asylum, Leon Bloy made communion every day of his adult life. Since there were periods during which he took scarcely any other food, he may be said literally to have lived upon the wafer and the wine which are regarded by Catholics as substantial body and blood of Christ. This is, I believe, regarded as a religious excess. But everything in Bloy is excess. If 'exuberance is beauty' and 'the road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom', Bloy should have been, in Blake's sense, a superlative artist and superlatively wise.

It would be fatally easy to regard Bloy from the standpoint of the psychologist. This has in fact been done by Ernest Seillière, who argues that Bloy's whole life and work were an

enormous structure of megalomania. Seillièr points to the claims made by Bloy to have received (*via* Anne-Marie) a specific revelation, known only to himself, and to have been marked out for a leading rôle in the new scheme of salvation, which involved some form of Second Coming. Bloy, according to Seillièr, first sought to ally and later to identify himself with God, he and Jesus Christ constituting one embodiment of *le Pauvre*. The answer to this is very simple. It is that, despite enormous deprivations, Bloy lived to the age of seventy-one in full possession of his faculties. What looks like persecution mania and what look like delusions of grandeur are not so in the clinical sense. A streak of coprophily may be detected in Bloy's constant use of images drawn from the privy, but that it did not assume the proportions of a sexual perversion many years of happy marriage indicate.

Bloy had in fact a complete and sustained vision of the world, and it is clearly stated in the two novels which he wrote in his fortieth and fiftieth years. 'Complete' is indeed the key-word. Bloy's total imaginative effort was to extend and interlock the two most perfect philosophical structures of the European mind, the horizontal Aristotelian classification of species or great chain of being and the vertical Christian doctrine of the communion of saints, which insists that not only are all living men brothers but that the living, the dead and the unborn constitute a single community, that the dead can 'pray' for the living and the living for the dead or the unborn.

When a coin is given to a beggar with a bad grace, says Bloy in *Le Sang du pauvre*, this coin 'pierces the poor man's hand, falls, pierces the earth, makes holes in the suns, flies across the firmament and compromises the universe'. In this context, Bloy gives to such mysterious inter-relatedness of things the name of 'reversibility'—'nom philosophe du grand dogme de la communion des saints'. Clearly it is not philosophy as the academies understand it. Remy de Gourmont's verdict on Bloy was that his books appeared to be the result of a collaboration between St. Thomas Aquinas and Gargantua. At the same time, such asides are not mere

rhetorical flourish. Bloy's view of money was entirely consistent. '*L'argent, c'est le sang du pauvre*', is the key-statement. Money flows through the universe like blood, and the rich man is a cannibal.

But all the profane functions enter into the scheme of redemption. Sex, for instance. The body of any woman is, for Bloy, the body of the Blessed Virgin, a tabernacle of Christ. The body of a woman is, moreover (not 'represents' but 'is'), the Garden of Eden. This being so, it is clear that prostitution is more than economic misfortune, and marriages of convenience or the social activities of an *allumeuse* cosmic disasters. A sombre epithalamion in *The Woman who was Poor* describes what happens to the universe when Léopold and Clotilde marry. In the space of a minute, a hundred persons have died and a hundred are born, '*une centaine de vagissements et une centaine de derniers soupirs*'. In an hour's time, there are six thousand corpses under the bed. For the joy of lovers must be paid. In order that two people may abstract themselves for a while from the suffering world, the sufferings of the rest of mankind are increased. '*Au moment même où vous bélerez de volupté*', through the walls of the marriage-chamber may be heard the weeping and the gnashing of teeth of the man who had no wedding garment and was cast into outer darkness. '*L'Heure qui passe ! Voyez-vous ce défilé de soixante Minutes frêles aux talons d'airain dont chacune écrase la terre. . . .*'

An equally remarkable passage in *Salut par les Juifs* describes the effect of the Crucifixion upon the animals during the period when darkness covered the earth. In *La Femme pauvre*, Marchenoir discusses the animals with Clotilde. Marchenoir insists that the animals suffer not only through but for man. Clotilde desires to know whether such a belief is concordant with divine justice, since the animals die without hope of salvation. Marchenoir's reply echoes Kant on the *Ding an sich*, though it is improbable that Bloy read Kant.

' . . . You would like to know how they are rewarded or paid off. If I knew and could tell you, I should be God, *mademoiselle*, for then I should know what the animals are *in themselves* and no longer, merely, in relation to man. Haven't

you noticed we can only perceive beings and things in their relations with other beings and other things, never in their ground and in their essence? There is not a man on earth who can rightly affirm, with full assurance, that any perceptible form is indelible and bears within itself the character of eternity. We are "sleepers" . . . and the outside world figures in our dreams as "a riddle in a glass". We shall not understand this "world of lamentation" until all hidden things are revealed to us. . . . Till then, we have to accept, with the ignorance of sheep, the sight of universal immolation, telling ourselves that if grief were not shrouded in mystery, it would have neither power nor beauty to enroll martyrs and wouldn't even deserve that the animals should endure it.'

At the centre of Bloy's 'reversible' universe stands the figure of Christ the Poor Man, Christ the scandal of the bourgeoisie. This Christ is a suffering Christ and a Christ who has need of humanity. Such a figure verges on heresy in the West. Angelus Silesius said, 'I know that without me God cannot live an instant', and his isolated cry finds numerous echoes in the East, if we are to believe M. Berdyaev. Jehovah was frequently said to be angry. In the West, enquiries into the emotional life of God are discouraged.

The intellectual content of Marchenoir-Bloy's conversion in *Le Désespéré* is uncommon. Two thousand years of the silence of God could not be endlessly protracted. '*Il conclut au conditionnel désespoir des millénaires.* . . . He kneaded a handful of time to make himself an eternity and manufactured his hope from the bitterest pessimism. He persuaded himself that we are dealing with a Lord God emasculate by His own Will, infertile by decree, bound, nailed, perishing in the incrustable reality of His Essence, as He had been, symbolically and visibly, in the bloody adventure of His Hypostasis. He had the intuition of a kind of Divine Impotence, contracted provisionally between Mercy and Justice, towards some ineffable recuperation of a Substance wasted by Love.' It is not the business of a literary critic to assist the Holy Office in smelling out heresies. In the context of this vision and generally in the work of Bloy and his successors, we are,

however, confronted with certain specifically literary problems. For all literary creation is myth-making activity, and we may therefore suppose that a practising myth-maker who happens also to owe allegiance to a fixed and embodied mythology is likely to find himself in difficulties.

The moral difficulties of a Catholic novelist have been closely examined by François Mauriac in *Le Roman* (1928) and again in *God and Mammon*. Mauriac's specific difficulties were further analysed by Charles du Bos in *François Mauriac: et le problème du romancier catholique* (1933). It would be interesting to see these three essays studied by some non-Catholic critic. Here let us content ourselves with stating the moral problem of the Catholic novelist in its simplest terms. 'Dare he presume to justify himself in rooting out the most unusual sins, to which his professional interest will lead him, when their presentation in a book may scandalise and even corrupt his more simple Catholic reader?' To a non-Christian, this problem appears a little superficial and indeed a little comic (it is possible that a communist would understand it), but one has only to read Mauriac on the problem to see that it really travails him.

Of this kind of scruple, Léon Bloy was apparently incapable. He was, however, greatly affected by a second and more fundamental difficulty, which is only hinted at by Mauriac and du Bos. In *God and Mammon*, Mauriac allows it briefly to be seen that, instead of giving coherence and direction to his work, the faith tends to distract him, to absorb his energies, to fix him in lyrical ecstasy, in the *folie de la Croix*. This conflict was stated already by George Herbert in the seventeenth century.

' Nothing could seem too rich to clothe the sun,
Much less those joys which trample on his head.

As flames do work and wind when they ascend,
So did I weave myself into the sense.
But while I bustled, I might hear a friend
Whisper, " How wide is all this long pretence !
There is in love a sweetness ready penned :
Copy out only that, and save expense ".'

The truth of the matter is that the creative imagination, dealing with experience 'according to its own laws, makes discoveries which the praying, the believing soul does not acknowledge. There is a sense in which the creative imagination is repugnant to Christianity and to any fixed and embodied myth. It is a question of time and space, of the dramatic, the dynamic qualities of existence.

By this train of thought we are led back to the considerations with which these notes opened. The literary function of the Catholic faith in the nineteenth century was to provide occasions for blasphemy. But indeed has there ever been a period in which the literary mind stood in any simple and direct relation to the Catholic faith? A number of modern studies suggest that even Dante cultivated a secret doctrine in conflict with the official teaching. Throughout the Christian era, literature and heresy have flourished together, the Provençal poets with the Albigenses, Norman-Celtic romance with the cult of the Sangraal, the Italian renaissance with neo-Platonism and the renaissance elsewhere with the Lutheran and Calvinist reformations. Or, if a poet has not been a heretic, at least he has been a great sinner and a rebel, like François Villon and the later succession of *poètes maudits*. Or else he gives way to despair in order to increase the dramatic tension between himself and the vision before which he tends to melt into a lyrical stasis. Dostoevsky had to bury himself in the Siberian mines, with Dmitri Karamazov. In imagination, he had to sink down out of the presence even of the natural light. 'And then we men underground will sing from the bowels of the earth a glorious hymn to God, with Whom is joy.' Kierkegaard based his theology on despair. The Christian myth is undramatic, like the story of the prodigal son. Within the pattern of Christianity, only sin, despair and heresy release the imagination.

When a new tradition of absolute faith begins, as it began in France with Bloy, may we not then expect that it will conceal a heresy? For no heretic begins by proposing to be a heretic. All heresies begin with a desire to purify and strengthen the faith.

There is Manichaeism of the ordinary kind in Bloy, the Manichaeism which condemns the natural order as evil in itself. There is also a political Manichaeism which divides the world between the poor and the bourgeoisie. The poor are represented by Christ, Who is, quite simply, *le Pauvre*. What demiurge is responsible for the bourgeoisie? Bloy, luckily, does not say. Péguy, who stood in far greater danger of excommunication, was less extreme in this matter. Péguy distinguished clearly between poverty and destitution (*pauvreté* and *misère*) and stated that, while the former is man's normal and blessed state, it is every man's duty to destroy the latter. Bloy makes of destitution-poverty not so much a vocation as a sacrament. Though he did not propose this addition with the bland cynicism which prompted Montherlant to suggest that divorce should be made a sacrament, yet he was looking for the truth in premises long vacated by the faith to which he belonged.

Chapter Two

THE PRIEST AS SCAPEGOAT

CERTAIN NOTIONS THAT I HAD ENTERTAINED for a long time about the work of Georges Bernanos in particular were crystallised for me when I read the following in a paper by D. W. Winnicott and Clare Britton on *The Problem of Homeless Children* : ' Each child, according to the degree of his distrust, and according to the degree of his hopelessness about the loss of his own home (and sometimes his recognition of the inadequacy of that home while it lasted), is all the time testing the hostel staff as he would test his own parents. Sometimes he does this directly, but most of the time he is content to let another child do the testing for him. An important thing about this testing is that it is not something that can be achieved and done with. Always somebody has to be a nuisance. Often one of the staff will say : " We'd be all right if it weren't for Tommy . . . ", but in point of fact the others can only afford to be " all right " because Tommy is being a nuisance, and is proving to them that the home can stand up to Tommy's testing, and could therefore presumably stand up to their own.'

It is curious how the psychological emphasis has shifted off ' repression ' since the war. The feeling of insecurity and a lack of childhood discipline are now regarded as the chief source of our ills. If Dr. Winnicott were an army psychiatrist or any kind of official spokesman, I might be suspicious of his emphasis on ' discipline ' . But I happen to know him for a peculiarly disinterested man with no axe to grind. Not even an anti-Freudian axe. For all the separate conclusions to which his extensive field-work in peace-time and war-time has brought him, Dr. Winnicott still regards himself as a Freudian and officiates for the British Institute of Psycho-Analysis.

His general view is that a child requires to have its original feeling of infinity closely delimited and its life confined within

a circle. If the laws established by a child's parents prove unreliable, if the child can break them with impunity, the feeling of infinity becomes an abyss of nothingness and sets up acute distress and indeed despair in the child. He looks elsewhere for his circle of authority and tests the law personified by his teachers and later by the police. 'The young delinquent', says Dr. Winnicott in another paper on *Delinquency Research*, 'values and loves the policeman.' And he points out that 'the thief's inability to keep and enjoy what is stolen is well known. The boy who steals apples from an orchard and who eats the apples himself is not ill, is not a delinquent. He is just greedy, and his greed is relatively conscious. The anti-social child steals apples and either wastes them or gives them away. Intermediate is the boy who eats them and is sick, the sickness being a bodily form of feeling guilty.'

I am afraid that these considerations may seem a little remote from the subject proposed in the title of this essay. I offer them in elucidation of the first statement I have taken from Dr. Winnicott. This is entirely germane to my purpose.

What I had been thinking about Bernanos was that all the priests who are central characters in his novels are employed as scapegoats in a quite primitive, magical sense. Then I began to compare Bernanos with other Catholic writers and with non-Catholic writers, and after a while it began to seem to me that all the key characters in fiction were scapegoats in one sense or another. Indeed, I began to wonder whether the whole of our narrative and dramatic literature were not a concerted effort to find and employ scapegoats.

I fancied that somewhere there must exist a heavy thesis by a German professor in which all this is set forth, but I have been unable to find it. Instead, I found 'Tommy' in Dr. Winnicott's Oxfordshire hostel, a link between primitive ritual and sophisticated literature, and I felt that the argument had already become a great deal less far-fetched. I opened *The Golden Bough* with an easy mind. The original scapegoat was Jewish. 'On the Day of Atonement, which

was the tenth day of the seventh month, the Jewish high-priest laid both his hands on the head of a live goat, confessed over it all the iniquities of the Children of Israel, and having thereby transferred the sins of the people to the beast, sent it away into the wilderness.' Fraser is full of the most enchanting details of the use of animal and inanimate creatures for the private and communal expulsion of sin or sickness among the peoples of every part of the world, but of course a human scapegoat is the most efficient. 'The devices to which the cunning and selfish savage resorts for the sake of easing himself at the expense of his neighbour are manifold.' It is uncertain to what extent Fraser ever realised that 'the cunning and selfish savage' is ubiquitous and eternal. He never let on. He was a wise man and quietly finished his work. The dig at religious mythology was comparatively safe.

'The accumulated misfortunes and sins of the whole people are sometimes laid upon the dying god, who is supposed to bear them away for ever, leaving the people innocent and happy.' But I must not go on quoting from *The Golden Bough*. It is probably accessible to every reader of these pages. Before I move to literary territory, I would like simply to point out that a journalistic misuse of the word 'scapegoat' is widely current to-day and that it is no part of the word's original sense to imply blame. To-day we have lost the sense of our own guilt. It is always 'they' and never 'we' who have sinned. In this respect we have fallen below the moral and indeed the psychological level of 'the cunning and selfish savage'. Anti-Semitism and Vansittartism do not properly employ Jews or Germans as scapegoats. They impute sin to the victim and name it as the cause of the people's misfortunes. The function of a true scapegoat is beneficial, and scapegoats are to be loved.

THE NIGHT A NEW PRIEST ARRIVES IN THE village, a man is murdered. The new priest, sensitive, pale and mysteriously ill, turns out in the end to be a girl. The murdered man was the expected priest. The girl commits

suicide after a confession. Lesbian practices lay at the root of her disorder. In other words, she had broken a very serious *tabu*. The priest paid the price of her guilt and unhappiness. After masquerading as a priest and thus taking his function to herself, she also must die. That is the plot of *The Crime*, the earliest, least sophisticated and perhaps even least mythological of Bernanos' novels and the only one in which the subject-matter is explicitly that of a thriller. However, no novel by Bernanos is without a body.

Bernanos is best known in this country for *The Diary of a Country Priest* and *A Diary of My Times* (*Les Grands Cimetières sous la Lune*). These were translated and published in England in 1936 and 1937. *The Diary of a Country Priest* had a popular success. But *The Crime* and *The Star of Satan* had been published in translation some years before and quickly remaindered. I bought both books in 1939 for sixpence and ninepence respectively from Woolworth's and from a tobacconist's lending library.

A Diary of My Times is not a work of fiction and does not concern us here. The work of Georges Bernanos divides cleanly into two parts, the fiction (whose theme is constant and obsessive) and the polemics. *A Diary of My Times* is a protest against the massacres perpetrated by Franco's men in Majorca. By it, Bernanos gained a great deal of credit among non-Catholics during the Spanish Civil War.

In *The Diary of a Country Priest*, a young priest already sick dies at his post. He dies for and from the sins of his village. These sins drain away through him, and in the end he chokes up (his only other food is dry bread and sour wine). The sin which finishes him off is the sin of excessive love of the creature on the part of the *châtelaine*. In terms of primitive *tabu*, this was a form of lingering incest wish. The young priest brings it to light and subjugates it in the manner of a psycho-analyst with a gift for the theatre (but the scene is also reminiscent of a medieval conjuration of demons), and that is the end of him. His cancer proliferates at an unheard-of rate, and he dies.

L'Imposture and its sequel, *La Joie*, concern a priest who has

lost his faith. He is presented rather unsympathetically, but it is implied that contemporary city life (he functions in Paris) has choked his channels of grace. He is in fact an inefficient scapegoat. Full of his own sins, how can he absorb the sins of others? The fact that he is a city priest is already symptomatic. To go to a remote village is a stage on the journey to the wilderness. This priest is refusing to take that journey. In Paris, an old man dies because of the priest's inability to bring down help from God or, contrariwise, to draw away the old man's sins. Then the priest leaves Paris for a remote village, but lives obstinately at the *château*. Here, in *La Joie*, he exerts a remoter influence upon a young, beautiful and well-born girl who is in an acute state of grace. The connection is not stated, but it appears to the imagination to be in some way as a result of this influence that the girl is presently murdered by the Russian chauffeur who cannot endure the spectacle of so much God-given joy and who has observed the girl at her prayers. Perhaps it is that the girl herself must be the scapegoat because the priest cannot or will not. However, not only has the murder itself a distinctly erotic flavour, but the seeing the girl at prayer is also done in the style of Susannah and the Elders, as if prayer were a thing peculiarly not to be observed by members of the opposite sex.

The Star of Satan presents a feminine type whose sin Bernanos looks upon with profound compassion and whose story he tells again in the *Nouvelle Histoire de Mouchette*, where, however, expiation is secured by non-clerical means. *Mouchette* is the girl ill-treated at home who goes wrong at a tender age, normally with older men who are her social superiors.

Again the connection is curiously inexplicit. But in some mysterious way the *Mouchette* of *The Star of Satan* is redeemed by the struggles of a clumsy young priest both with his own stubborn (caprine?) soul and with an exterior devil who causes him to lose himself at night (in the wilderness?) and to walk round in circles. The young priest in *The Star of Satan* flagellates and wears about his middle a rope so tight that it eats into his flesh.

A class of scapegoats with whom Bernanos has merely

implicit dealings are witches. With the master of all covens, however, the prince of evil, the key-scapegoat, he makes overt play. And indeed Bernanos is the only known case of a novelist causing the devil himself to appear in the middle of a perfectly serious novel. In the *Star of Satan*, the devil personally presents himself to the Curé de Lumbres at night on that country road in the guise of a talkative wayfarer and causes the young priest to lose his sense of direction and fail in a mission, only to be confronted with a greater mission at the first light of dawn.

As I say, Bernanos does not explicitly broach the subject of witchcraft. His work nevertheless contains elements which only a knowledge of the secret paths of witchcraft will elucidate. Similarly, he does not explicitly broach the subject of *Poltergeister* and yet treads repeatedly on *Poltergeist* territory. Is the *Poltergeist* a scapegoat? In the sense that people blame their *alter ego*, the beast in themselves which is 'brought out', the 'something' which is 'bigger' than they are, he is. For he is clearly a disturbance caused in the environment by the individual who is pestered.

Let us note, at any rate, that Bernanos' portrait of the devil closely resembles the friendly little man in black or grey who recurs incessantly throughout the two hundred years of witchcraft trials. Let us also note that Mouchette is the type of *Poltergeist* girl in early puberty of which the most notable contemporary representative was Marguerite Rozier of Lyons, whose phenomena were first exhibited in 1930. Perhaps most significant of all is the fact that the young priest of *The Star of Satan* is modelled upon the Curé d'Ars and that the Curé d'Ars was troubled all his life by rappings, displacement of objects and inexplicable outbreaks of fire, which have made him as classic a *Poltergeist* figure as the Rev. Samuel Wesley and which Mr. Gerald Heard attributes to a form of electrical energy generated by intense prayer.

LET US BE QUITE FRANK AND ADMIT THAT AN element of Bernanos' appeal to his reader is pornographic. Flagellation, transvestism, the seduction of fourteen-year-olds

by middle-aged rakes, the sadistic murder of pure girls of good family by proletarian debauchees who are foreigners and peeping Toms into the bargain . . . these are the familiar ingredients of rubber-shop literature, with or without the shutters of the confessional, the priestly robe, the candle-lit study and the clouds of incense.¹ Yet Bernanos is a serious and at times an exquisite artist. He is a superb rhetorician, a profound judge of motive, a man tender and generous (as only a Latin seems able to be) in his attitude to public affairs² and a considerable scholar. His narrative technique is possibly unequalled in our time. The prose is massive and simple in its weight, fluid and direct in its address. There is no other writer who could make a spasm of conscience last fifty pages and be neither dull and unconvincing, nor yet fantastic and buzzing with conceits.

The type of Christian faith which M. Bernanos exemplifies is dignified, modest and quite free from either sensationalism or hysteria. From his polemical writing, he must be judged to be a liberal moralist disinclined to debate points of theology with his religious superiors but of a resolute independence in his casuistry. He derives the manner of his eloquence from Léon Bloy and Charles Péguy, but displays none of Bloy's private anguish, none of his highly coloured, analogical and indeed allegorical theologising, and none of Péguy's affecta-

¹ Let us also be scrupulously fair and admit that Bernanos is sparing of his incense. Perhaps no other Catholic writer has so little of it blowing about his pages. Indeed, he rarely takes us inside a church at all. The candle-lit study, hall and passages of the presbytery are his favourite *mise en scène*. It is also as well to point out that the appeal of pornography is by no means a superficial one. The evil of pornography is like the evil of public oratory and lies in the fact that it appeals too directly and with insufficient control to the deepest instincts, and this is the level attacked also by mythology.

² What other Catholic came so well out of the Spanish affair? Only Maritain. At the same time, it should be noted that there was a rough division by orders. Where Jesuit influence prevailed (and this appeared to include the rank and file of secular priests), Franco's disgusting crusade was taken at its face value. On the whole, and notably in this country, the Dominicans and those whom they directed were more judicious.

tions of a pre-Tridentine simplicity. The direct descendant of Bloy is Berdyaev, a Russian. The direct descendants of Péguy are Gill, Chesterton, Pepler, the bucolic, tankard-draining, hand-loom-weaving, one-acre-and-a-cow English Arcadians. In France itself, the Mendelian laws of intellectual descent operate with greater complexity, though from Péguy we derive J.O.C., the *Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique*, and the manual thought of M. Denis de Rougement. Like Bloy, Bernanos lives in the world and attacks *les bien-pensants*, but his fantasy has been chastened by Péguy. Like both, he is a French patriot. Unlike both, he shows no special predilection for the poor. So far as an infidel can judge, he stands in far less danger of excommunication than did either of his predecessors.

But a man gives away his predicament in dreams. In a body of work as cleanly divided as Bernanos', his fiction will represent the dream-life as T. S. Eliot's poetry does. A number of Eliot's prose doctrines are refuted in his verse, and much of Bernanos' rhetoric is given the lie by fictions produced when the censor was nodding and the will rampant.

The work of Georges Bernanos is at bottom primitive, pre-Christian. At the same time, its appeal is also post-Christian and not at all uncongenial to an audience conditioned by the theories of Freud and his successors. As music plays directly upon the rhythms of the heart-beat and the bowels, Bernanos, though he uses Christian stage-properties and Christian prestige, plays upon the most deeply flowing mass-impulses of mankind. Bernanos (in his fiction) is a witch-doctor. He is also a psycho-analyst for whom, and for his patients, primitive magic is still operative and primitive *tabus* still valid. The excitement attached to watching a girl pray is a marked instance. And always in the centre of the stage stands the figure of the scapegoat priest, on whom we load all our sins and send him out into the wilderness and who is the point at which primitive belief assumes the Christian paraphernalia.

There is a little recognised form of heresy or predisposition

towards heresy which consists in taking the part for the whole or an attribute for the reality. All forms of idolatry indeed are in some sense identical with the erotic tendency known as fetishism. The heretic in such a case may never give overt expression to an heretical doctrine. He substitutes an ancillary for the central mystery and adores something other than incarnate God. It is not far from the truth to say that Bernanos adores the priestly function. Adores? At least he is obsessed with it. And the erotic analogy persists. The feeling changes with the object. The fetishist cannot be truly said to love the shoe or the fur-coat in the sense in which he ought to have loved its possessor.

Is it perhaps that for the intelligent, contemporary Catholic the priest is a figure he cannot accept? It must be obvious to an intelligent Catholic that priests are commonly stupid and that many of them mislead their flocks. Does he, therefore, wish to attach to them a primitive, magical and quasi-phallic significance in order to fit them into his world-picture at all? To working-class Protestants in provincial towns, the Catholic priest is at once a figure of ridicule and fear. I was brought up to believe that when a Catholic priest visits the house of one of his parishioners, he leaves his umbrella on the door-step as a sign that nobody, least of all the husband, must enter.

Certainly, the rank-and-file, secular priest is the central figure in Catholicism, and certainly Catholic intellectuals are embarrassed by him. He must be either sentimentalised, deplored or haloed with primitive mystery. He is more popular with anti-clerical writers than with his co-religionists. The lecherous, tormented priests of Liam O'Flaherty, the bumbling idiots of Joyce, are more alive than anything in *croyant* literature. Léon Bloy ignored the secular priest, though he wrote of Trappists and Carthusians. Graham Greene has one book, *The Power and the Glory*, which I imagine to have been directly inspired by Bernanos. The priest here is placed in a country which Greene visited, hated and failed to understand, and he is a bibulous fellow of weak character but an efficient scapegoat. Otherwise, Greene ignores all

priests, secular and cloistered. His liveliest cleric is an unfrocked Anglican.

In Greene's novels, the plumbing system of grace is in full flow, but the scapegoats are laymen, preferably criminals and almost certainly lapsed Catholics. But the machinery of fear is altogether more elaborate and sophisticated in Greene. Fear itself is his obsession, fear his theme. In *Brighton Rock*, which has been commonly regarded as Greene's masterpiece, it is explicitly stated that the forces of good and evil must be felt with maximum impact and that a bad Catholic is superior to a good pagan for this reason. In other words, faith increases the *frisson*. The chief argument for belief is that, if you do not believe, you cannot be damned.

TOMMY CAN BE TRULY SAID TO MISBEHAVE himself on behalf of the other children. From the children's point of view, he is a true scapegoat. 'The others can only afford to be "all right" because Tommy is being a nuisance.' But the children are not the whole community. There are also the members of the staff who say, 'We'd be all right if it weren't for Tommy'. The wilderness into which the other children send Tommy is the wilderness of adult disapproval, and unfortunately the wilderness in this case has a point of view of its own. To the child community, Tommy is a scapegoat. To the adult community, he is a young criminal.

It is probable that there must always be a similar ambiguity in the rôle of scapegoat in a highly developed and complex society. I have already remarked on the journalistic misuse of 'scapegoat' to mean 'those on whom one lays the blame'. The Jews for the anti-Semite, the Germans for Lord Vansittart, the war itself for the man in the street, the *bourgeoisie* for orthodox communists, the machine for the Arcadians . . . are all fulfilling some of the functions of a true scapegoat, but the fact is unrecognised by those who employ them. The scapegoat's function, of which all men feel the need, has receded into unconsciousness, and 'the cunning and

'selfish savage' of the twentieth century has succumbed to the final indignity of hating the useful saviour-beast on whom he lays the burden of his sins.

On the other hand, a class of scapegoats who formerly met with unmitigated disapproval have in the modern world received something like adulation from certain groups in society. Now here we have a situation like that in Dr. Winnicott's hostel. The criminal of the gangster films is 'Tommy'. Who are 'the other children'? Can it be that they are the orphans of industrial capitalism, the working classes and the dispossessed in general? As a matter of demonstrable fact, they are. The upper and middle-classes do not read *No Orchids for Miss Blandish*. They read Edgar Wallace or the academic thriller, in which the police or the private detective are the heroes, though we must not forget the vogue of Raffles among the displaced members of the officer class who sold vacuum-cleaners after the last war.

It is evident that the German professor who writes that heavy thesis will have to be a Marxist. To-day is not the only hey-day of the property criminals. We remember Villon and other *poètes maudits*. The greatest popular hero this country ever had was a property criminal, Robin Hood, who retired to the wilderness of Sherwood Forest. The type of mild and amiable scapegoat hero in a more settled age was Robinson Crusoe.

But these are impure types. The criminal scapegoat, the scapegoat hero and another, the scapegoat-fool . . . are the only considerable mythological figures so far employed in Hollywood. The fool has his own history. Mr. Polly was the type of many scapegoat-fools in the English novel, Rip van Winkle in the American. Both were inferior to Chaplin on the films. The Germans may be said to have created the scapegoat leader or in other words to have formed themselves up in a column with the goat at their head and all marched into the desert together.

This is in fact the only method by which a scapegoat may be employed for revolutionary purposes. To have an efficient scapegoat makes for contentment and good behaviour. From

their own point of view, our rulers do well to encourage the proletarian adulation of gangsters on the films, if not indeed to allow a substantial criminal class to flourish within the social framework on the American pattern. The members of the hostel staff will no doubt bear this in mind.

A final point of mythological interest. The human scapegoats of the ancient world, although frequently the representatives of God, were invariably chosen for some physical peculiarity, deformity or condition of sickness. Moreover, to give them a positive, fertilising function in addition to their primary task in the expulsion of evil, they were in some communities chastised upon the genital organs 'with squills and branches of the wild fig'. Contemporary creators of literary scapegoats have unconsciously returned with increasing clarity to these original types.

Especially has the criminal scapegoat tended of late towards abnormality. Graham Greene's simplest exemplar, the killer in *A Gun for Sale*, has a hare-lip of which he is constantly and bitterly conscious. In the film, in which Alan Ladd plays the part, this lip is changed for a wrist deformed by the killer's mother with a flat-iron. Pop-eye in William Faulkner's *Sanctuary* and Slim in *No Orchards for Miss Blandish* are both impotent. Pop-eye avails himself of a common fertility symbol, the corn-cob. The boy in *Brighton Rock* is not impotent, but he experiences great difficulty. He is a creature of markedly low physique.

The Bernanos priests are at once ill, of stubborn conscience and socially inept or marked out to be outcasts. The good ones are untrained country youths whose scrupulosity tortures them very nearly to the point of madness. There is also a peculiar fitness in the priest's black robe.

If we take the view that human society ought to develop in the direction of greater individual responsibility, we shall of course deplore all scapegoats and (with Fraser) regard their history as 'an endless number of very unamiable devices for palming off upon someone else the trouble which a man shrinks from bearing himself'. But if we are in favour of the natural man or if we despair of exterminating in ourselves

'the cunning, selfish savage' and the homeless child, yet it is still clearly preferable that scapegoats should be volunteers, as they frequently were in the ancient world and as they are at the New Year festival in Lhasa to-day. In this respect, M. Bernanos exhibits a fine willingness. The degree of his self-identification with his victims is unusual. Many people in this country believed that *The Diary of a Country Priest* was a true diary and, although we are unused to priests with moustaches, that the person on the jacket wrapped in a great muffler and with burning, phthisic eyes was the dying priest himself. It is he in fact, the author, who will take away your sins. It may be observed, however, that, in making this offer, M. Bernanos is doing no more than his duty as an intellectual to-day. For, despite the long and distinguished succession of *poètes maudits*, there never was an age in which of itself the possession of exceptional gifts of intelligence or sensibility so qualified a man for employment in the vicarious expulsion of evils.

THE BULK OF THIS CHAPTER WAS WRITTEN before the publication in England of *The Open Mind* (1945). The original, *Monsieur Ouine*, had appeared in Buenos Aires two years previously, but no copy of it came my way.

The Open Mind is in many ways the least satisfying novel Bernanos has given us. It is clear that the translator is partly at fault. His attempt to be highly idiomatic has covered the book with a thin coating of totally inappropriate English public-school slang. Whatever splendour the language of the original may have had is lost. However, the trouble lies deeper than this.

The Bernanos mythology has gone to pieces. The flat ground of boredom and of sins whose chief characteristic (as says the saint of Lumbres in *The Star of Satan*) is their awful monotony, has broken up into a volcanic region of murder and insanity. The priest's mission is ineffectual, and indeed no priest is introduced until towards the end. The closest approximation to a true scapegoat is *Monsieur Ouine*

himself, a radical intellectual. If the inert, malignant parish of the earlier novels was indeed a parable of the world, this village of Fenouille is evidently a world at war.

In the first place, no previous novel of Bernanos has contained so many characters. It is clear that the author did not know on whom to fix his spotlight. At first it appears that we are to see all through the eyes of 'Steeny', a middle-class boy whose widowed mother and English governess seem to be involved in some kind of Lesbian relationship with each other. But the spotlight quickly shifts to the crazy *châtelaine*, an aging tom-boy who drives a huge mare, sleeps with the young men of the village, destroys her husband with sloth and discouragement, alternately abducts young 'Steeny' and attempts to run him down with her mare, and goes to the police with accusations against Monsieur Ouine, her husband's friend, who has a room in the *château*, who is dying (but this is not at first made clear, so that we may regard his death as one of those mysterious, expiatory deaths with which Bernanos has made us familiar) and by whom she is at once fascinated and outraged. Monsieur Ouine becomes 'Steeny's' confidant and monitor, though what he teaches him is uncertain unless it be to know himself (Monsieur Ouine is a character from the same mould as the Irish doctor in an American masterpiece, Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*, with which indeed there are other parallels in this book). But again the spotlight shifts. It is turned upon a Flemish farmer, his crippled grandson and his grand-daughter whose husband, a poacher, is suspected of the murder of a little cowherd. The Old 'Un appears to decide for these two that they shall commit suicide. They do. The mayor is next pushed to the centre of the stage, a man with a big, over-sensitive nose, who is smitten with remorse over his youthful excesses and spends his days frantically scrubbing himself to get rid of the smell of sin. He goes mad and later escapes to the presbytery in his pyjamas. He, the priest and the *châtelaine* all make extraordinary speeches at the funeral. The priest and the mayor are laughed at. The *châtelaine* so incenses the crowd by scratching the face of one of their number and allowing her

more to kick another in the chest that they fall upon her, overturn her carriage and beat her to death. All this takes place amid a fury of veiled accusations and anonymous letters.

Elements of the original mythology are still to be found lying about the book, and indeed the theme of this chapter becomes explicit and self-conscious at one point. 'Hatred of priests', says the author *in propria persona*, 'is one of the most profound human emotions, and among the least clearly understood. Doubtless it is as old as humanity. If the present age has contrived to raise it to an almost magic level of subtle efficacy, that is because the abasement or disappearance of other powers has made of the priest, apparently so closely related to the very structure of our society, a being more eccentric, harder to classify, than any of those magic greybeards whom the ancient world kept sequestered in temples, in close commerce only with the gods. To-day the priest is all the more strange and hard to classify, in that he will not admit that he is exceptional, nearly always himself the dupe of gross surface appearances, fooled by the ironic respect of some, the servile championship of others.' There are still other creatures prepared for sacrifice, even if it is only within the framework of the class-struggle. Of the *châtelaine*, just before her death at the hands of the crowd, we read, 'Probably they did not know they hated her. Or perhaps they saw, and yet could not recognise, in mysterious shape, their own abject state. And she, whose equals refused to meet her, suspected by everyone, was a kind of victim left by her class to the other to be devoured, a hostage forfeited in advance. Even so, the village still awaited that blunder which should really deliver her into their hands, some funny, catcall-provoking incident which would justify anything. The world of to-day is full of such mysterious hostages.' But the machinery by which the sacrificial process takes place has been shattered. There is no effective hostage.

The Pagan Empire is personified by Dr. Malépine, a smart rationalist full of psychiatric jargon. The priest's accusation against him and against rationalists in general is that they have 'sealed up God's name in poor men's hearts'. 'In

future,' says the priest, 'the poor will no longer have words to name what they lack.' The priest feels defeated by his parish, and his vision extends to the world. 'This village and many others like it. . . . Yes, when they break out in flames you may see all kinds of strange beasts emerging, whose names humanity forgot long ago, always supposing it ever gave them any'. And again, in less apocalyptic language, 'The moment will come when to preach hope, in a world organised for despair, will be tantamount to throwing a live coal into a powder-cask.' Monsieur Ouine, a teacher of resignation and modern languages, dies empty. He has achieved perfect balance, like a dead tree.

The myth is destroyed. Prospero's staff is broken and his books at the bottom of the sea. This marks the end of a remarkable cycle of novels and it may be the beginning of a new cycle. *The Open Mind* is disordered by something which looks like a breakdown of faith. It might have been a better novel if it had been held together more firmly by faith. At the same time, it might also have been a better novel if it had contained no faith, if it had been held together by despair, which a number of our contemporaries have shown to be an excellent medium.

Chapter Three

THE CASE OF M. FRANÇOIS MAURIAC

FRANÇOIS MAURIAC WAS ALREADY AN ESTABLISHED figure in 1929, for he is one of the few living writers noticed by the fourteenth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, where it may be read that he was born in 1885 and that his novels 'are concerned with the essential problems of life. They are by no means easy or light reading.' His works are listed up to *Destinies* (1928). Since *Destinies*, M. Mauriac has produced seven further novels, making a total little short of twenty. He has also written books on Racine, Pascal, Jesus and a large number of general subjects, together with plays, short stories and several volumes of verse now out of print. M. Mauriac is the Catholic novelist on a grand scale. His political record is excellent. The young men of the resistance can find, we are told, no words of praise sufficient for his behaviour under the German occupation. Nor did he at any time fall so heavily for Franco as Claudel did. At the same time, on a purely literary level, one is given to understand that *les jeunes* are no longer impressed. Their principal charge appears to be that Mauriac deals with artificial moral situations.

From the specialised point of view of this essay, Mauriac is certainly less interesting to *write about* than either Bloy or Bernanos. I italicise 'write about' because I do not wish to suggest that he is less intrinsically interesting, though I dare say it will turn out in the end that he was less interesting to read too. English readers will presently be able to judge for themselves. *Destinies*, *Thérèse Desqueyroux*, *Le Noeud de Vipères* and *The Life of Jesus* were translated some years ago. The last was indeed serialised in a newspaper. And now an English publisher has set afoot an ambitious programme of further translations, beginning with *A Woman of the Pharisees*. But certainly there is less mythology in Mauriac than in

either Bloy or Bernanos and consequently also less magic. Despite his unquestionable piety, one never doubts that Mauriac's feet are firmly planted on the earth. He distinguishes clearly between the natural order and that which constitutes the subject-matter of theology, and it is certain that none of the human situations with which he deals will ever call for the intrusion of a *deus ex machina*. The boards of the stage are firmly screwed down, there are no overhead wires, and the wings are free of swans on trolleys. At most, one's vision may be disturbed by curious, three-dimensional images flickering on the cyclorama.

M. Mauriac writes, needless to say, about sin. Yet, as with Graham Greene, it is not particularly easy to distinguish sin in this context from what in a pagan novelist would pass for neurosis, except insofar as the author, in his manner of speech, betrays greater agitation.

THE DEEP SEAM OF REGIONALISM IN THE FRENCH novel runs right through Mauriac. Even when they are to be found upon the pavements of Paris, his characters invariably come from the Landes in the neighbourhood of Bordeaux, and most of his characters stay there. Two atmospheres blanket everything, a summer and a winter atmosphere, an atmosphere of siesta and scorching vineyards and an atmosphere of shuttered houses in which landlords brood greedily and destroy each other to a nocturnal accompaniment of murmuring pines. Bernanos, though born in Paris, also has his region, the septentrional hinterland of Boulogne, where the intruder is likely to be a Fleming as in the Midi he would be an Italian or a Jew, but in Bernanos the sense of enclosure is less fearful. There is a lid on Mauriac's region.

Mauriac was himself born in Bordeaux and lived there till he was twenty. I take from a fairly comprehensive biography in Louis Chaigne's *Vies et Oeuvres d'écrivains* Mauriac's own statement of his sense of attachment to the town. 'The houses, the streets of Bordeaux,' says Mauriac, 'are the events of my life. When the train slows down on the bridge

across the Garonne and I see in the twilight the huge body stretched and wedded to the bend of the river, I look for the place, marked by some belfry or church, of a moment of happiness, a sin, a dream.' A born Catholic (he tells us in *God and Mammon* how he envies converts), his earliest education was administered by the Sisters of the Holy Family and the Marianite Fathers in Bordeaux. The solitary, tearful, devout childhood of which he has freely told us and which is rehearsed frequently in his novels will cause the suspicion to enter many minds that throughout his work an impulse to get his own back on *les grandes personnes* has been at work. His first literary influences were Baudelaire, Rimbaud '*et tous les maudits*'. This was also the case with Paul Claudel, another faithful son of the church.

Tall, thin, dark, nervous, a brilliant conversationalist afflicted with melancholy, Mauriac began as a poet, but published two novels before the war of 1914, during which he served in a hospital. *Le Baiser au lépreux*, published in 1922, established him as a writer. From this date, his novels began to appear with annual regularity. He was elected to the Académie Française in 1933.

The four earliest novels, *L'Enfant chargé de chaînes*, *La Robe prétexte*, *La Chair et le Sang* and *Préséances*, are all studies of young people in a state of religious difficulty. *Le Baiser au lépreux* gives us the portrait of a village girl married to an unfortunate member of the local squirearchy, whose embraces she evades but to whose memory she remains faithful as a widow, for which she is given full marks by the author. *Le Fleuve de feu* describes a girl whose piety does not prevent her from recurrent seduction, but who is redeemed by a woman friend of extraordinary purity.

In *Génitrix*, 1923, Fernand Cazenave, a middle-aged rentier, has married a young neighbour, Mathilde. He is very much under the influence of his mother, and his hobby is cutting out moral maxims from books and newspapers. He formerly had a mistress in the town, his '*habitude*', whom he visited for three days at a time with his mother's approval. His mother hates Mathilde and has made her life intolerable,

segregating her in a separate wing of the house, while her son returns to his childhood room next door to hers. At the opening of the novel, Mathilde, pregnant, is dying in a condition of fever. These opening pages are unquestionably the finest in the book. After the death of Mathilde, Fernand discovers that he loved or at any rate that he now loves her. He blames his mother's neglect for her death, sleeps in the dead woman's room, where he sets up a shrine with lilies about her portrait, and generally 'goes to pieces'. Mme. Cazenave dies, having accepted the situation and found a degree of peace in renunciation of her too much loved son. Fernand installs a faithful retainer's family and takes a fleeting interest in their little boy. The peasants dominate the house until, with a momentary return of his mother's power of command, he drives them out. He walks through the deserted house and subsides into a chair in the old servant's room, because here are the most recent traces of human warmth. The servant creeps in. She is all that remains of his life. Fernand Cazenave collapses and weeps abjectly upon her bosom.

Le Mal and *Le Désert de l'amour* present respectively a woman and a father and son, all three ravaged by love, who return to the comfort of the family and savour the pleasures of renunciation.

The heroine of *Thérèse Desqueyroux*, 1926, is the daughter of a radical landowner and politician. She is not beautiful, but she is 'charm itself' and well-educated. She marries the son of the neighbouring estate, her intimate friend's brother Bernard, in order to assume as early as she may her permanent place in the world. She takes unkindly to physical intimacy with a man, and while she is on her distasteful honeymoon, letters from senior members of the La Trave family to Bernard and from Anne to Thérèse indicate that Anne is in love with Jean Azévédo, a tenant suspected of T.B. and Jewish blood. The La Traves appeal to Thérèse to use her influence on Anne. Thérèse agrees. Anne is taken away on a holiday. Thérèse works on Azévédo, discovers that he is not in love with Anne, but has treated her with respect.

Azévedo is an intellectual, and Thérèse is fascinated. Her disgust with Bernard increases, and she attempts unsuccessfully to poison him. The idea comes into her head when, in the flurry of a fire in the vineyards, she sees him give himself a double dose of Fowler, which he is taking for his heart. The La Traves withhold evidence. Thérèse is acquitted. At this point the narrative begins, the bulk of the story being presented in retrospect as Thérèse drives from the court to her husband's home. Thérèse is kept prisoner in a wing of the house, until she becomes half-demented. After a long-delayed explanation with her husband, she is taken by him to Paris and left to her own devices, with a small income.

Destinies, 1927, has reminded more than one critic of Colette's *Chéri*. It is also, in several opinions (for instance, André Gide's), one of Mauriac's finest achievements. It is inferior to *Chéri*. Mauriac displays little of Colette's uncanny understanding of and sympathy with the spoilt, handsome youth, too much loved and too easily debauched. One feels that Mauriac has tried, but that his love is purely caritative, all *agape* and no *eros*. And so the emphasis tends to be placed not on Bob Lagave himself but on the widow, Elisabeth Gornac, who takes care of him in the country after an illness and who conceals a desperate love for him (there is an extraordinary scene in which, in the language of the barracks, he offers derisively to 'slip her a length'). *Destinies* is important as a sign of Mauriac's impatience with the over-pious. Elisabeth's *bien-pensant* son breaks up Lagave's engagement with a young girl who might have saved him and thereby precipitates the final catastrophe.

Religion is again vindicated in *Ce qui était perdu*, and there is an unreasonable, Lutheran coercion by divine grace in *Le Nocud de vipères*. *Le Mystère Frontenac* is a hymn to family life. In *La Fin de la nuit*, we return to Thérèse Desqueyroux, who occurs yet again in *Plongées*, a collection of stories. She too is to be saved. Mauriac's religion is finally established. His next production will be not a novel, but *The Life of Jesus*, 1936. It is a course steered perilously between the divine

and the human natures of the second person of the holy trinity, but without mishap.

We are now left with three wholly mature novels, *Les Anges noirs* (1936), *Les Chemins de la mer* (1939) and *A Woman of the Pharisees* (1941).

Les Anges noirs is a study of a murderer redeemed. We are not shown either the machinery or the psychology of redemption. The process is irrational and coercive in the Protestant or Jansenist tradition. Mauriac's intention was, so far as it can be judged from the end-product, to depict the most wholly debased and criminal life that he could conceive, to indicate that even this life could be redeemed and to invite us to admire the limitless and unaccountable mercy of God. How in fact was the salvation of Gabriel Gradère operated? By T.B. fastening on lungs weakened by wet weather on the night of his crime? By the fact that, shortly before the dénouement, he performed an act of kindness towards a persecuted little country priest? By the prayers and ministrations of this priest? By the 'malevolent taciturnity' and fear of scandal which caused his relatives to refrain from giving him up to justice and allowed him the time in which to make a good end? Clearly none of these is the answer intended by Mauriac, any more than Gradère's criminality would be admitted by Mauriac to be interpretable in terms of sociology, Gradère being a peasant uprooted, adopted and spoilt by the local gentry. *Les Anges noirs* is by no means one of Mauriac's finest achievements. It is interesting for its final decision that *anybody* may be saved. It is interesting too for its suggestion of a literary influence emanating from Mauriac's junior, Georges Bernanos. The abbé Forcas is treated throughout as a child. This is not a trick that Bernanos would have employed to heighten the personal insufficiency of his mysterious channels of grace. Much less would he have resorted, in order to bring off the trick, to calling his priest at frequent intervals by his Christian name, as Mauriac does. There is, nevertheless, more than a hint of the scapegoat or 'mysterious hostage' in the abbé Forcas. 'He is the mock of the village. He is overwhelmed by

ridicule, by shame. A coward: they spit at him, and he says nothing. If they brought him to the slaughterhouse, he would not bellow. Other people charge him with all the filthy acts which they themselves commit in secret, and he is content to assume them all. He resists the impulse to cry out that it is not he: a poor human Aunt Sally, the butt of everybody's derision, and he makes no reply. All alone in his church, mumbling his *Oremus*—and his good parishioners, like yourself, avoid and despise him.' The chapter in which the abbé Forcas kneels over the school-book containing Gradère's confession and wrestles with temptations to despair is a wraith of the mighty self-searchings of Bernanos' priests. The abbé Forcas is similarly distrusted by his superiors. And there is one curious echo of the Bernanos approach to holy pornography in a scene in which the little boy who serves the abbé Forcas at mass sits and watches the confessional in which the *châtelaine* is spewing up her knowledge of the murder. Only her feet are visible. '*De loin il surveille les souliers sous le rideau de lustrine: il y en a un qui s'agit par instants, qui frétille, puis s'apaise.*'

Les Chemins de la Mer deals with the ruin of a wealthy family. Like many French writings of the time, it seems to reflect the Stavisky affair. Oscar Révolou, bankrupt and left by his expensive mistress, shoots himself. His elder son, unable to face responsibility, becomes bed-ridden. Mme. Révolou displays fortitude, but presently dies. The daughter, Rose, is engaged to the second son of Léonie Costadot, whose eldest son has attached himself to Révolou's ex-mistress. The engagement is broken despite a determined effort to be generous on the part of this second son. The younger son of Révolou and the youngest Costadot are school-friends. Young Costadot writes excellent verse on classical themes. Shady finance reappears in the person of Landin, Révolou's head clerk, who, after the Révolou *débâcle*, runs dubious newspapers. Young Costadot is with Landin on the night on which Landin is murdered. Young Costadot joins the colonial army. The one property remaining to the Révolous (in the neighbourhood, needless to say, of Bordeaux) is made

to pay by a peasant retainer whose daughter is seduced and presently married by the young Révolou, who treats her with contempt. Rose Révolou quarrels with the peasant wife over the child and, convicted of sterility and jealousy, her life finished at twenty-two, runs away. A passage which occurs at the point where she makes the decision to leave her brother and his wife in the ancestral home is also printed as an epigraph to the book and clearly intended to reveal the significance of the whole lamentable story. 'The life of the majority of mankind', runs this passage, 'is a dead road and leads to nothing. But others know, from childhood, that they are making for an unknown sea. Already the bitterness of the wind surprises them, already the taste of salt is on their lips—until, the last dune passed, this infinite passion whips them with sand and spray. It remains for them either to plunge in or to retrace their steps.' The point of this eludes me. The destiny of Rose Révolou appears to me pathetic but commonplace. An epigraph so weighty appears to me to be misplaced. A socially, politically and economically significant figure Rose may be, but I cannot see the religious implications or indeed what sin Rose is convicted of, much less what inescapable fatality may be thought to have her in its grip. It seems to me that in this novel, the values of his meridional *rentiers*, which Mauriac elsewhere castigates, have become his own.

Technically, *Les Chemins de la Mer* is superb. The Cyclops eye of a tram approaching through the fog is used with a cumulative symbolic effect which for me is paralleled only by the striking of public clocks in *Mrs. Dalloway*.

A Woman of the Pharisees is the first of the Mauriac novels to appear in a new English translation by Mr. Gerard Hopkins, so that it is now generally available to English readers. It suggests Léon Bloy more clearly than any other of Mauriac's novels, not excepting *Le Baiser au lépreux*. The Bloy characters are a saintly schoolmaster, M. Puybaraud, and the no less saintly schoolmistress, Octavie Tronche, whom he marries. As a result of this marriage, M. Puybaraud is relieved of his teaching post. This could have been prevented by the title-

character, Mme. Brigitte Pian, the narrator's stepmother, of whom both are *protégés*, but who considers it good for their souls that they should starve. She pays the rent of the miserable hovel in which they live, brings them small quantities of food, and considers them obligated to the profoundest gratitude, as indeed in their innocence they try very hard to be. The scene in which this harpy storms at their ingratitude in hiring a decrepit piano which neither can play is the purest Bloy. That piano belongs essentially to the Léopold-Clotilde household in *The Woman who was Poor*. Brigitte Pian herself is in the line of Bloy's miserly and treacherous literary patrons. Her self-deception is nevertheless wonderfully handled. Bloy could not have done it so well, could not have viewed this Pharisee with such detachment (but Mauriac has not suffered in his own person the indignities and frustrations of extreme poverty, as Bloy did). Indeed, after permitting her to wreck a remarkable sequence of lives, Mauriac determines to redeem this creature too. She becomes suddenly endowed with the grace of self-knowledge, perceives the error of her ways and achieves patience and humility.

A Woman of the Pharisees is possibly also the liveliest of Mauriac's novels. Its exuberance, its multiplicity and even the signs of an engaging naïveté are shown here as nowhere else. Intertwined with the Bloy story are themes by Alain Fournier. Mauriac had created tortured adolescents before. Indeed, his early novels are largely concerned with tortured adolescents. But nowhere else does he achieve the atmospheric brilliance of this novel's great set-piece—totally unrelated to the Pharisaism of Brigitte Pian—in which Jean Mirbel stands beneath the window of an inn at which his mother appears beside the dreadful little townee intellectual with whom she is spending the night.

Not content with these borrowings, M. Mauriac again attempts in this novel a Bernanos curé, Jean Mirbel's tutor.

It is odd that the most derivative of a sequence of twenty novels should also be the last and in a number of respects the best. The fact suggests that Mauriac's nose has been too deeply immersed in the greasy pots of youthful reminiscence

and that even to look up and see other *literature* has been for him a step in the direction of *life*, to employ a familiar antithesis. And indeed it is true that during the period of German occupation and since then, that is to say, in the period since *A Woman of the Pharisees*, Mauriac's figure has emerged in French public life with a remarkable lustre. At the age of sixty, we behold the termination of a long and painful adolescence.

ONE'S TONE OF VOICE DOES NOT DECEIVE, AND the reader will already have perceived in these notes a certain lack of sympathy or at any rate of enthusiasm for the work of François Mauriac. I had better therefore specify my attitude as one of great admiration tempered with a kind of inward protest which I shall presently attempt to justify. And so it would be as well to set out first what is claimed for Mauriac by those whose admiration is undiluted. Luckily, we have the testimony of two names familiar to English readers, those of Graham Greene, certainly one of our own finest living novelists, and of the late Charles du Bos, who was educated in England and whose *Byron and the Need for Fatality* and at least one volume of whose *Approximations* exist in translation.

Mr. Greene, writing in *La France Libre* for April 1945, begins by stating that the religious sense disappeared from the English novel at the death of Henry James. He selects, among James's successors, Virginia Woolf, in whom, he says, we find pure, undetermined consciousness, with no feeling for the importance of the individual and no conviction that man has a soul to be saved. D. H. Lawrence is curiously dismissed as at best a horrid warning, along with Mr. Compton Mackenzie. Even Trollope's ragged curates, says Mr. Greene, are more significant (as a Catholic, he dodges this question-begging word by saying, 'We are made aware that he exists, not only for the woman to whom he is speaking, but also in the sight of God') than Mrs. Dalloway shopping in Regent Street. Mauriac, whose translation into English is proceeding under Mr. Greene's auspices, is offered as a means of stopping

the rot. Mauriac 'belongs to the grand tradition of the novel. . . . We are tired of the dogmatically "pure" novel. . . . The exclusion of the author can go too far. Even the author, poor fellow, has the right to exist; and M. Mauriac reaffirms this right.' Mr. Greene admits that Mauriac's plots are a little 'jumpy', like early films, but this is more than compensated for, in Mr. Greene's opinion, by the solidity of the characters, who 'would have existed no less, we feel,' if the novels in which they occur had never been written. But most important is the sense of an 'I' behind the 'I' of the author and the fact that the author himself speaks upon occasion with the authentic voice of Pascal.

With Charles du Bos, we come to a mind which many years of exclusively critical practice taught to be more careful in his choice of arguments if not more moderate in his claims.

The Catholic novelist, said M. du Bos, is privileged. He knows the truth. He sees life in its dimension of depth, and the life of man is extended for him downwards into the animal kingdom and upwards into the angelic. This does not prevent a certain kind of writing done by Catholics with a view to instruction from falsifying reality. Nevertheless—and M. du Bos here quoted Jacques Rivièrē—'There is a kind of naïveté about any non-Christian writer: He invariably presents the appearance of a person from whom somebody is hiding something and who does not suspect it. There is a certain final movement of the mind which he has not the least idea how to make. There is a level at which he does not function. He comes, he goes; I admire his dexterity, his firmness, his point; perhaps I envy his liberty, and the fact that he can without scruple hit off the truth so joyously and ruthlessly. But I know that, faced with a certain very direct question that I could suddenly put to him, he would be without a reply and would have nothing to fall back upon but a display of wit.' Mauriac, having been let into the secret and so never at a loss when faced with direct questions, was, moreover, said M. du Bos, gifted with the most perfect sincerity that had been seen in France since Rivièrē himself died, taking his sincerity with him.

M. du Bos then proceeded to an analysis of the evolution of Mauriac's faith as it is displayed in the novels and elsewhere up to the publication of *Le Noeud de vipères* (the essay was published in 1934). For M. du Bos, those books were the most important which displayed the most triumphant or alternatively the most tormented faith. *Destinies*, to M. du Bos, was a terrible hymn of hate. *Le Noeud de vipères* was the fulfilment and the vindication. According to M. du Bos, Mauriac has traversed the mystical way of the saints; *Destinies* and an essay, *Souffrances du chrétien*, constituting his record of the dark night of the soul. It is, therefore, an evolution which permits of no criticism. The lyrical beauty of the writing itself left M. du Bos breathless.

LET US NOW SAMPLE ADVERSE OPINION IN THE writings of M. Jean Vaudal, the late Benjamin Crémieux and M. Jean-Paul Sartre. It is interesting to note that Mauriac's critics pick out for especial blame precisely those elements in his work which Mr. Greene and M. du Bos especially praise.

Vaudal insists on the monotony of Mauriac. The essence of Mauriac's genius is so completely distilled that every word he writes is saturated with it, and 'a few lines . . . give us the whole work and, replacing it in our minds, so to speak annul it'. Vaudal finds the source of this monotony in the general source of Mauriac's work, in his religion, '*la source catholique—ne serait-il pas plus juste de parler de condition catholique?* —*de ses livres*. *Il peut sembler que cette religion, bien souvent implicite, d'ailleurs, et jamais dogmatique, ne prend et ne donne son sens, ne joue pour dire le mot, qu'en fonction de cette monotonie quasi obsessionnelle de la création*. *Tout se passe comme si entre l'exigence spirituelle et la technique romanesque il y avait marché passé : la ferveur de M. Mauriac a besoin de ses misérables héros, oui, mais eux-mêmes, si dénus, comment se passeraient-ils de la foi de leur auteur ?*'

Mauriac, says Vaudal, excels in the rendering of the 'atmosphere', half-interior, half-exterior, in which desires, velleities, disgusts, terrors, are born and develop. He paints

states and not mental facts . . . moins les microbes que les milieux. This approach also leads to monotony. 'It demands an exact equilibrium, a sort of curious rigour.' A little more 'atmosphere', and the characters would dissolve. A little more psychology, and they become fixed and impoverished. Mauriac is a tightrope-walker between reality and the abyss.

From Benjamin Crémieux, I take simply the indication of two vulnerable points in this massive *œuvre*. In Mauriac, one waits upon divine grace in an atmosphere of burning sulphur. It is by thus poisoning our lungs that Mauriac compels us to accept anything of his vision. After a deep breath, one sees that it was all 'the evocation of a bourgeois world, stupidly enslaved by anti-natural superstitions, absurd prejudices, irremediably sick and putrid'.

Further, Mauriac's picture even of this world dates back to 1910 and is no longer true. And here Crémieux confirms what I have already hinted. Mauriac's whole work is 'built upon memories or visions of childhood, thought over between the ages of twenty and twenty-five'. For Mauriac has but three themes. The first is the will to dominate. The second is 'provincial boredom, derived from solitude; engendering the desire for evasion by flight or even crime unless, too long contained, it breaks out in a middle-aged passion for some gigolo or young coquette'. The third is cupidity or avarice.

Jean-Paul Sartre, possibly the most energetic, lively and intelligent of all the younger French writers, wrote very carefully on Mauriac in the *Nouvelle Revue Française* for February 1939. This was before the full elaboration of Sartre's own philosophical persuasions *vis-à-vis* Martin Heidegger in *L'Etre et le Néant*, and it is possible that now, himself burdened with a philosophy, Sartre could no longer view Mauriac with quite the same eyes. However, this article, *M. François Mauriac et la Liberté*, stands in its own right. M. Sartre would disavow it in vain.

He starts with the demands which he, as a reader, makes upon the novel. His first demand is that the characters shall be free. This is in line with the distinction made by Ramon

Fernandez between the novel proper and the *récit*, which is merely an account of things pre-determined. The characters of a Christian author ought to be particularly free, for Christianity is the religion of individual freedom, and indeed it might even be regarded as the religion of novelists, for the notion of 'sin' is essentially a novelist's twist introduced into the plot of man's life on earth. The novel of Mauriac's which Sartre then proceeds to analyse is *La Fin de la Nuit*, the sequel to *Thérèse Desqueyroux*, in which Mauriac explicitly sets himself to study 'the power given even to those of God's creatures who are the most burdened with fatality, the power to say no to the law which crushes them'. The argument is that in fact Thérèse does not exhibit this power, that Mauriac robs her of the freedom with which he has pretended to endow her.

Sartre performs for *La Fin de la Nuit* a critical task which has long needed performing for prose fiction in general. He analyses Mauriac's use of the third person. There are certain novels (those of Henry James or of Virginia Woolf, for instance) in which the 'he' or the 'she' of the narrative is merely a distanced narrator's 'I'. There are others in which the 'he' or the 'she' is predominantly a person observed in action. Sartre here introduces one of the pairs of constructed terms which make *L'Etre et le Néant* and existentialist writing in general at once so surface-simple and so profoundly ambiguous—'elle-sujet' and 'elle-objet'. Mauriac is condemned for passing rapidly from one to the other, so that at one moment he is inside his heroine's mind, thinking her thoughts and seeing with her eyes, and the next he is outside her, describing her and indeed passing judgment on her. I think Sartre makes a mistake in supposing that Mauriac alone displays this fundamentally dishonest use of the third person. It seems to me to be characteristic of the novel in general. It seems to me that the discomfort of this equivocation lies at the root of almost all modern experimentation in the novel-form. Henry James and Virginia Woolf have largely done away with the objective 'he' or 'she' in one kind of novel-writing. I know of no novel in which at any

rate the one character who functions as a quasi-narrator is without a subjective 'he' or 'she', though Conrad, Hemingway and Steinbeck have long passages in which they have managed to sustain a cinematographic objectivity. Indeed, it seems to me likely that the wholly objective novel is impossible, and that the only completely unequivocal narrative-form is that of a forthright first-person, by which at least all the characters but one are clearly presented from the outside. It is, however, true that Mauriac pops in and out of his characters' minds rather more unashamedly than most, that he pops very far in at times and that when he pops out again he is inclined to withdraw himself to an immoderate and in fact a God-like distance. This is the point at which Sartre attacks.

Thérèse, despite the author's statement of intentions, is wholly pre-determined. Her actions are not free. Whatever she does is referred back to some necessity in her being (which of course was given her by Mauriac). For instance, when she triumphs by some vulgar, wounding retort, we are referred back to 'the power she had been given to poison and corrupt'. Mauriac's freedom is doctrinaire and not actual, theological and not (dare we use the word?) existential. Sartre goes on to analyse Mauriac's dialogue and finds it theatrical (as opposed to novelesque) in that it never rambles, but is employed strictly to carry forward the action of the book from one pre-determined point to another. Mauriac is compared with the English novelists and with Dostoievsky, in whose interminable conversations one is made aware of unlimited possibilities, so that one never knows what turn the action is going to take next.

In short . . . but I quote Sartre's concluding paragraphs. *La Fin de la Nuit*, he says, 'is not a novel. Can you call this angular, frozen work, part theatre, part analysis, part poetical meditation, a "novel"? These false starts, this violent braking, these painful recapitulations, this jolting to a standstill, can they be confused with the majestic course of time in a novel? Is it possible to be carried away by this immobile narrative, whose intellectual armament is taken in at a glance

and in which the mute figures of the heroes are inscribed like angles within a circle? If it is true that a novel is a *thing*, like a picture, like an architect's building, if it is true that a novel is made with free consciousnesses and consecutive time, as a picture is painted with colours and oil, *La Fin de la Nuit* is not a novel—at most an adding-up of signs and intentions. M. Mauriac is not a novelist.

'Why? Why has this serious and attentive author not achieved his purpose? It is the sin of pride, I think. He has ignored, as for that matter most of our authors do, the fact that the theory of relativity applies in its totality to the world of the novel, that, in a true novel, as in the world of Einstein, there is no place for a privileged observer and that in the system of a novelist, just as in the system of physics, no experiment can be carried out to show whether this system is in motion or at rest. M. Mauriac preferred his own way. He chose divine omniscience and omnipotence. But a novel is written by a man for men. In the eyes of God, which see through appearances without dwelling on them, there is no novel, no art, since art lives by appearances. God is not an artist; neither is M. Mauriac.'

It is not necessary to go the whole way with M. Jean-Paul Sartre. If Mauriac is not a novelist and an artist according to Sartre's view of art and the novel, he is nevertheless something quite remarkable according to a view of art and the novel which he has managed to impose on a large number of people. But a point which Sartre's article brings out with extraordinary force is that technique and spirit can never be separated in a piece of writing. Mauriac's religion and his method are one thing and not two. And the characteristic signs of Mauriac's religion are frigidity and gloom.

IN ORDER TO HATE M. FRANÇOIS MAURIAC AS he could be hated, one would need to be D. H. Lawrence. That is to say, one would need to be committed to the opposite myth, that man is naturally good, the flesh wholly innocent and the world beautiful. If only one could be D. H. Lawrence

for a moment, how one could rail at Mauriac for an unclean gossip, a watch-committee puritan, a life-denier.

Alas, if one is not D. H. Lawrence, one sees that such propositions as that the world is beautiful are not so much contrary to the truth as meaningless. They are pseudo-statements. It is like saying that women are beautiful. Some of them, of course, are, but then, on the other hand, some of them and perhaps the majority are distinctly plain. In the same way, the world (meaning, presumably, the mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms) is extraordinarily varied, especially those parts of it which serve or have served as the habitations of man, though I dare say a great many ex-soldiers have mixed feelings about the untouched jungle too.

As to sex, I remember having a correspondence with Mr. James Peter Cooney, American editor of *Phoenix* and a devout Laurentian. He was very angry with Mr. Hugh Kingsmill for saying in his book on Lawrence that sex was invariably either comical or repulsive. I tried to explain to Cooney that Mr. Hugh Kingsmill (if in fact he made this statement and had not succeeded in angering Cooney by something far less sweeping) was probably speaking in all sincerity and basing whatever he said on personal experience, in which case he was rather to be pitied than blamed. I ventured, moreover, to suggest that even Lawrence's private experience of sex must have been on occasion either comical or repulsive and that Lawrence was guilty of a certain dishonesty in presenting sex as a uniformly solemn, mystical and ennobling influence and altogether ignoring its occasionally comical side (Lawrence frequently laughed, but his laughter was of a bowel-tearing, cosmic variety and not at all good-natured or light-hearted). Surely, I said, the truth is two-sided. Sometimes sex is awful, and sometimes it is funny. Rather occasionally, it is like a clap of thunder and a revelation. At its married best, it is a gay, instructive, sensitising and well-mannered game. It is also a means of generating children. And so on. But would Cooney listen? Not he. As to Mr. Hugh Kingsmill, I have had no correspondence with him on the matter. In any case, I dare say he is too old to learn now.

And so one cannot quite attack Mauriac with the vehemence that D. H. Lawrence would have assumed. All the same, it is certain that he carries the opposite myth a little too far. The Jansenist gloom is excessive. The peasants are too abject, their masters too greedy and self-righteous, the young people much too far along the primrose path to the everlasting bonfire. The vale of tears through which M. François Mauriac drags his characters is unrelieved. Nobody sings. Nobody dances. Nobody is good-looking, except as a sign of degeneracy. Copulation is a long-drawn, serpentine agony. Nobody has any fun at all.

Perhaps this is what the paragraphist of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* meant when he wrote that M. Mauriac's novels are 'concerned with the essential problems of life'. But may we not assume that happiness is known to exist, even though its incidence be low? And is happiness also not therefore one of the 'essential problems of life'? Some indeed have argued that it is the only problem.

Clearly, there is malice in M. Mauriac's picture of the world. Clearly, also, there is doctrine. Childish and adolescent fixity and vindictiveness I have already suggested, and so did Crémieux. The complete psychological picture of M. Mauriac it is scarcely decent to attempt during his life-time. Let us, however, examine a little more closely the part which religion plays in his work.

The trend of Mauriac's religious apologetic is so to present the world that without God it would be intolerable. The existence of God is therefore proved in the sense that it is shown to be pragmatically necessary. This is the most desperate atheism. Or perhaps it should be regarded simply as magic and conjuration. By creating an artificial vacuum, Mauriac would appear to lay compulsion upon the uncreated to produce some entity capable of filling it.

By a kind of sorcery, Mauriac robs his characters of their freedom. They are spellbound. They are 'overlooked' by M. Mauriac's evil eye. Or shall we say that he is a midnight thief brandishing the Hand of Glory? The Hand of Glory was the dried and pickled hand of a hanged man. If a candle

made of another hanged man's fat were lighted and placed in the palm, or if the finger-ends of the Hand of Glory itself were lighted, all those in the neighbourhood became transfixed and immobile and could not stir a finger or bat an eyelid. If the light on one of the fingers went out, an occupant of the burgled house had awokened, and it was time to be off. M. Mauriac is, in another and less wholesome sense than his co-religionist M. Bernanos, a novelist-witch. By a similar kind of sorcery, he has tried to compel God (the God of his childhood) to exist. But the lights on several of the fingers of the Hand of Glory are ducking from the wind and flickering out. It is time to be off.

Chapter Four

THE TWILIGHT OF REASON

HOMO SAPIENS IS HAPPIEST WHEN HIS LIFE IS based upon a few unquestioned prejudices. Peace of mind seems to result from the belief that society is rational and that certain types of behaviour are eternally right. That is no doubt why, in the tottering, groaning structure of to-day, people are to be found undergoing spasmodic conversion to a primitive or an elaborate form of Christianity, an orgiastic political collectivism or a reactionary nationalism. They desire beyond all retention *to know what to do*. 'Knowing' what to do means for the great majority 'being told' what to do. This becomes clear not only from the study of Fascism, National Socialism, Communism and Tory Nationalism, from Catholicism and no less from Protestant Revivalism in the work of Karl Barth and his colleagues, but from the tendency of uprooted and uncertain people in the last resort to fall ill and to put themselves in the hands of a doctor.

But is to-day in fact markedly an age of tottering social and intellectual structures? That is to say, in a critical or an *epochal* sense, is there to-day abnormally widespread uncertainty and questioning, insecurity and emotional instability? That it is in the interest of journalists and politicians to create a diversion is well known. So many labels have been attached to the present age, and historical reminders have then been found to show that the characteristics indicated were no less marked in previous ages. There have been ages of unbelief before. The eighteenth century was an age of unbelief throughout Europe. The classical world immediately before and after the foundation of Christendom was a world shaken by unbelief. The unbelief of the ancient world is a little obscure to us. History has a way of clearing in patches, like fog. I am not sure that to-day

we can have much understanding of the ancient world. The whole mode of consciousness was different. But we understand the ages which underlie our own, and I think we may confidently say that certain fissures have opened wider since the eighteenth century and that our world is more unstable in certain respects than any world of which we have comprehensive historical knowledge.

At the Latin renaissance appeared the figure of man the demigod. At the Teutonic reformation appeared the figure of man a spirit responsible to God alone. In the eighteenth century appeared man the brother of man. Men as brothers were still demigods and responsible to God alone, but they needed each other in order to recreate the world. The desire to control nature and recreate the world was now paramount. Mythology adjusted itself piecemeal to the measure of this desire, and the stages of doubt were merely stages in this adjustment. The divine right of kings cancelled feudal obligations and extricated man from the power of the church. The rationalist criticism of eighteenth-century society created republics or turned the kings into lay figures. Scientific discovery largely freed man from the cosmic rhythm of nature out of strict obedience to which he had laboriously acquired his food. Marxism and other revolutionary doctrines have since urged man further towards the goal of a libertarian, egalitarian Utopia. But do men in fact desire to be free and equal? Apparently not. Dostoevsky, in *The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor*, was the first to see clearly that they do not, or at any rate the first to publicise the fact. If it is so, if the vast majority of mankind have inequality and submission in their very hearts, is it worth the while of the liberated few to keep on urging them to collaborate in the creation of better worlds? And does not the whole of post-renaissance mythology with regard to man break down?

The classical world believed in reason and the beautiful. The medieval world believed in reason overshadowed by faith, or reason as the pedestal of faith. The renaissance again believed in reason and the beautiful and the reformation in a faith previously formulated by reason. The eighteenth

century believed in reason alone. The present age is without faith, displays a curiously ill-developed sense of the beautiful and has come at last to reject the claims of reason.

Those who return to dogmatic Christianity, Catholic and Barthian alike, employ reason in their apologetic but not in their more intimate structures. Fascists and orgiastic demagogues generally employ reason to show that their enemies are inconsistent, but plunge their followers and later themselves into a collective ecstasy in which they feed or endeavour to feed upon racial memories, a diet apparently rich in vitamins but poisonous, exhibiting both the virtues and the faults of opium and benzedrine. The wilful invalids turn to the difficulties of birth, weaning and sexual differentiation as the Christian turns to original sin or the Fascist to race, the Tories and the Pétainists to tradition. Those who truly believe that by rational discussion, disinterested work and empirical organisation they can recreate the world in their image are fewer than any liberal or socialist politician likes to believe, and it is probable that they are numerically important only in the British Isles, the United States and Scandinavia and that even in these last homes of the liberal idea the barbarian, irrationalist forces have doubled and trebled themselves unobserved during the war.

The extremes to which men will go in defiance of reason are familiar enough. But action in defiance of reason is not quite the same thing as conscious disbelief in the usefulness of reason. The classical and the medieval worlds were able to contain (in the literal sense of the word 'contain') a great deal of defiance of reason, sometimes legalised and ritualised as in the Saturnalia and the *Fête des fous*, but nobody in the last resort questioned reason's validity.

In philosophy there are no axioms. Axioms are peculiar to arbitrary and self-contained intellectual structures like mathematics. This fact was the discovery of Kant. It rectified the errors of Descartes. It appears, nevertheless, that the impossibility of axioms in intellectual structures open to real experience has been ignored since Kant. Classical logic is still employed in the academies. It is employed also in

seminaries, where the name of Descartes is heard with distaste. And classical logic is the mathematical use of language.

In his book on St. Thomas Aquinas, M. Jacques Maritain sets out a sequence of what are in essence philosophical axioms. They are, he states, truths self-evident to common sense, and from them he claims that the whole structure of Catholic theology can be deduced by logical operations. These truths or principles are in fact operative in the Aquinate proofs of the existence of God and in all Christian apologetic. Common sense firmly believes, says Maritain, 'that what is is, that the same thing cannot be predicated at the same time as existent and non-existent, that in affirmation or denial, if we speak the truth, we are dealing with what is, that whatever happens has a cause, that the sensible world exists, that man has a substantial self, that our wills are free, that the primordial laws of morality are universal . . . that the world did not make itself and that its author is an intelligent being'. On these foundations is the *philosophia perennis* based. Without them, it crumbles. And yet, with the exception of the first two, of which one is a tautology and the other probably meaningless, none of these propositions meets with universal or indeed general assent at the present day, and as he approaches the end of the list many a reader will find his mind hardening into downright incredulity.

That the author of the world is an intelligent being is believed by scarcely anybody outside the churches. That the world made itself is an assumption which underlies almost the whole of contemporary science. No anthropologist could agree that any laws of morality are universal or admit that his field was sufficiently well covered to permit him to know which laws we meant by the 'primordial' ones. That our wills are free is disputed not only by Marxists, Freudians and the majority of natural scientists but by the entire Buddhist world. What constitutes 'a substantial self' would no doubt puzzle a great many commonsensical minds. Whether a sensible world exists is the basis of the whole idealist-realist debate which divides philosophy. And the rôle of the accidental appears to be on the increase in contemporary

physics, which therefore presumably does not believe that whatever happens has a cause.

Classical logic has gone the way of Euclidean geometry. Hegelian logic is felt to be suggestively, metaphorically applicable in much the same way as Freud's spatial pictures of the mind. All language is understood to-day to be metaphorical and all debate to be an interminable argument about the meanings of words. And so it comes about that a metaphysic in the sense in which the word has been traditionally understood is simply not possible. For all metaphysic is based upon logic, and traditional metaphysic crumbles with traditional logic. In a very high degree, this was already perceived by Kant. For this reason, he stopped short of metaphysic in his own work and lectured to his students out of a text-book by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten whose methods and conclusions he did not himself accept.

But the end of classical logic and the advent of total relativity do not inevitably mean the end of intellectual operations and the ecstatic reversion to a primitive group-consciousness. The edifice erected by Einstein required at least as much intellectual exertion as the edifices erected by Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas. Reason as a faculty moving according to the laws of traditional logic is not identical with the power and the impulse to reason. Nowadays we deny the sufficiency of reason, but we do not deny its usefulness. We wish to implement it with sensitively controlled intuitions and to withhold it from proliferating in a void of abstraction. We begin with reason, but we seek experimental verification, and then again we reason about the conditions under which our experiments were carried out.

It is, however, true that experimental methods and ethical relativity have so far produced unattractive results in the political field and exhibited here and there the signs of a disposition to wreck the whole basis of human relationship, which is . . . what? To answer this question may still be our only guarantee against total catastrophe. And we know that philosophy cannot answer it unless it is, in the Karl Jaspers formula, 'founded . . . in the depths of existence'.

Religion claims to answer it. The Catholic view of man's existence is beautifully stated in another book on St. Thomas Aquinas by the English Provincial of the Society of Jesus, the Rev. Fr. M. C. D'Arcy. 'In the philosophical chart,' says Fr. D'Arcy, 'man is the meeting-place of two worlds; his nature is multiple and multiplied in countless individuals; he is mind and body, united together in most intimate union, as matter and form, so as to produce but one nature. As such he has all the cravings of an intelligence for absolute truth and goodness, he is in revolt against the limitations of his organism, and yet he finds the world of experience and sense congenial to him. He asks for wisdom, and philosophy tires him; he seeks intuitive enjoyment, and the travail of body and mind generate only a concept, so that he has to find consolation in the *mimesis* of art, the contemplation of what is sensible. When he possesses what he wants, the body tires and tedium makes him turn to novelty. Quality, too, by the law of his being, is ever fading into quantity, the ideal to the sensible image, and philosophy is debased to a mathematical and physical science. Even morality, which should show forth the unchanging good, is in the composite creature, man, affected by his moods and emotions and lower passions; in fact they must provide the material of virtue and give it specific names.'

In the last five hundred years we have developed a curiously literary conception of what constitutes a man's life. It is natural that this should be so. Man's life is a mystery, and this is true not merely in the vague, cosmic sense that we know not whence man hath come nor whither he goeth. The actual composition of any individual life, here and now, in this world, is a mystery. The principle of its continuity is mysterious. Its discontinuity and lack of principle are no less so. And that both continuity and discontinuity, principle and lack of principle, coherence and incoherence, should always display themselves together in the process of a man's life is perhaps the greatest mystery of all. It is certainly a mystery that no philosopher will face, unless the existentialists may recently be thought to have faced it. Philosophers take sides. Either

a man's life is continuous and coherent, obedient to a single principle throughout, originating in a known cause and proceeding to a known destination. Or it is accidental and chaotic, and any apparent principle is no less so. Those are the two songs that philosophy sings. Theology sings the former, and common sense hesitates between the two. It is the natural tendency of lyrical poetry alone to sing the fragmentary song. The mind functions in categories and would like to believe them real. And the literary forms of biography, drama and fiction implement this natural wish. Even psychology with its defined general terms is less of a bed of Procrustes than the common forms of literature.

The writing and reading of fiction and biography give the mind an agreeable sense of coming to grips with reality and with the supreme reality of individual human life. But nothing could be more remote from the reality of a man's life than any version of it which could be written down. The mere writing gives form to things which had no form and substitutes an intellectual form for a form which once had reality. Every piece of writing is a dramatisation. Even a chemical equation dramatises the complicated mutual impact of substances. The equation is a brief synopsis. Certain common elements are abstracted and given balance and opposition. More is omitted than included. And this is true not only of shabby thought and cheap writing. It is only a little less true of the best of both. Biography is always tendentious and always untrue. Fiction and drama are further refinements of the biographical method. To praise no matter what play or novel for being 'true to life' is to prove oneself a fool. The naturalists, the photographic realists, are the most crafty liars of all. It is only when we accept the lying perspective as part of our material that we approach reality. Kafka was closer to reality than Zola. But what Kafka wrote was still fiction.

To simplify is to falsify. To embrace with a formula is to strangle. A country is not its map. And every man's written life is a literary fiction.

How, then, can we present the reality of a man's life? I

fancy there is no way. The whole of a man resides in a single hair of his head, yet in each hair differently. The reality of a man's life inheres in each of the thirty-odd million seconds of every year of his life, in the tedious days as wholly as the days of illumination, in no second less than another. We know many things about a man. We know that he is, in some sense, a bundle of appetites or propensities. He needs to eat, sleep, make love, investigate, submit, dominate, build and destroy. If he is frustrated in the gratification of any of these appetites or propensities his mind or his body becomes sick. And we have some idea, drawn largely from subjective experience, in what ways the experience of others enters into them. We can forecast often how a man of whom we know a little will behave in a given situation. And yet he remains mysterious. Even the personality which we know is something that is real only for us. It is a personality which is partly created and defined by our presence. In other company it is different. He is, as we say, a different man. He exists in a state of flux. He is a flow of existence. He is pure vibrancy. The personality which is continuous is also diffuse. It is hardly a personality at all. In solitude a man is diffuse. He takes form in relation only to an external situation. His friends and enemies define him. In a quite real sense, they create him. Only the poet and the artist, the mystic, have any personality in solitude. And that is because they are capable of defining themselves in relation to an imaginary world first defined by themselves. And that is only partial. Other men are given momentary form by external circumstances. They become to some extent coherent. Impulses form together in a single or at least a perseverant will. They arrive at a general purpose. Their lives grow more rather than less continuous, in obedience to a more or less single principle. But the general body of their behaviour and experience remains diffuse. They have, as we say, 'no God'. They survive from day to day. If they are uprooted from habitual circumstances, thrown out of work or separated from their wives, they 'go to pieces'. And even their mothers and wives know very little about them. Even

the picture we draw of our most intimate companions is far too definite and far too literary. They are all implements rather than agents. They have no God, and yet they are used.

It is less true of great men than of little ones. That is what constitutes their greatness. A form is given to their behaviour and experience at an earlier age. It persists. They have a single will. They cohere. Their lives are less at the mercy of laziness, fear and cheap love. There is less waste, less diffusion. They exist in solitude. A principle of economy is operative in them. They have a God. If they are used, they know it. They are consciously used. They have, with Spinoza, seen freedom in the consciousness of necessity, and so they offer less resistance. They select their own data for consideration. Opportunity is visible. The free act is sometimes performed. Yet it is still only partial freedom.

That which is worked into the pattern chosen to be accomplished is only a fraction of the total experience of even the greatest of men. Their spontaneity is compromised. Violence and coercion exist at the heart of their every day. Their desires and their acts diverge. Something happens continually in the deeper sources of which they have no cognizance. What dreams troubled the sleep of Jesus of Nazareth? They run to waste in even the best moments. And yet we write their lives. Their own self-knowledge was imperfect. They were fragile and evanescent forms in a great chaos. They were glow-worms lying out on the great marshes. And yet, knowing only the smallest fraction of what they themselves knew, we select and give dramatic or epic form to their lives and assimilate them into the archives of literary fiction. They enter into the realms of biography which is no more than a vast racial mythology. The spurious essence is distilled in words. A myth survives. They vanish. And the myth which survives is that which is useful to those who make and listen to it. We take hints from the little that we do know and develop these into a pattern which is pleasant to contemplate, because it flatters some aesthetic or moralistic illusion and gives a new apparent simplicity to the life which

we know in ourselves to be complicated to the point of incomprehensibility. Life seems less unsafe. And that illusion of safety is necessary because men do not possess the courage of their own chaos.

It is for this reason that the conventions exist. The life of a man, for literary purposes, has its own specific rules, canons and keepings. It has a specific kind of verisimilitude to preserve. The intrusion of a foreign element, a false note, is intolerable.

Alas, the religious answer also is conventional. The conventions are original sin, damnation and redemption, personal sin and absolution, a one-sided immortality which has a beginning but no end, a history cut clean in two by the appearance in time of its God. Christianity thus imposes a plot on man's life. Christianity also punctuates man's life, dividing it into periods with appropriate sacraments of baptism, confirmation, marriage and death, dividing it into years with its yearly cycle of chief festivals, dividing it into weeks by a chain of Sundays, into days by its calendar of saints and into hours of the day by the tolling of the angelus. Even the loose, basic view of Fr. D'Arcy's formula makes man 'the meeting-place of two worlds', whereas he is the meeting-place and the dispersal-point of a hundred.

Catholicism to-day is at once an answer to and symptomatic of the unbalance of the age. The two designations are not incompatible. Symptoms have a positive value in all diseases. They are created as a partial answer to the patient's problem, insofar as that problem is a problem of self-expression and adjustment to the outside world. With the appearance of the rash or the nervous tic, the inner disorganisation is on its way towards stability. But in order that symptoms shall discharge the malady, it is necessary for the patient to believe in their necessity. If he thought that he had personally created and not been impersonally afflicted with these stigmata, he would scratch his spots until they festered or develop general paralysis in his determination not to twitch. Similarly, in order that faith may be efficacious, it is necessary for the believer to consider that he has been led to the altar either

never feels the abyss of nothingness. And so he remains or becomes a normal, happy child. In the work of Bernanos, we discover the primitive scapegoat, in Mauriac the boy who robs the orchard and is sick, in Bloy the fully developed delinquent. Their worlds are less secure than Claudel's. The springs are either out of action, or they give forth a disconcerting cacophony like burglar-alarms. Though each of these three is a Catholic and a patriot, they all lack the finish and the natural breeding of Claudel.

A fiction is the testing of a myth, a lie told by a child wishing and yet fearful to gain general acceptance for its private fantasies. A novel is a lie put about by an author to test the credulity of the world around him. That even the most extravagant lies are widely believed is the cause of momentary exaltation and then of anxiety and fixed depression in authors. A fiction is a personal myth, a myth not generally applicable. It is a masquerade and an act of defiance. Let us not be taken in by the general pronouncements and the religious adherence of Bloy, Bernanos, Mauriac, Greene. Or rather let us accept the seriousness of their attachment without supposing that their works of fiction are anything but anti-social in origin. Their potency as novelists is increased by their religious adherence. The defiance and the misleading of a world in which you do not believe offers little excitement.

With Claudel it is different. Claudel's heroes are puppets, children, fragments of personality, testing a world in which Claudel himself experiences little difficulty. Claudel is the author not of fictions but of a theatre upon which other people's fictions may be tried out, notably the fictions current in his own family and in the school-books. A thinker like Maritain may similarly be regarded as an intensely introverted child endlessly charting the adult world and forever putting off the moment of rebellion which he fears will land him in the bottomless abyss. The speculative thinker and the publicist do not commit themselves to a fiction, but only to the apparently rational groundwork upon which fictions may be erected by others.

The difficulty of carrying an argument of this kind to its

conclusion or indeed of attaching to it a sufficiently large number of concrete instances is that society and the written word itself are committed to a logical myth in which 'lies' are opposed to and presuppose a 'truth' of which they are considered to be perversions or contradictions. Benedetto Croce found himself in this difficulty with his 'morphology of error' many years ago and has reached his eightieth year without disposing of it better than by saying that error tends towards a truth so far imperfectly revealed. This truth will no doubt turn out to be the primeval mystery which Dionysius the Areopagite dimly perceived lurking behind the contingent, as it were provisional mysteries of the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation. To the God of earthly creeds, it will be the God of whom Meister Eckhart stuttered, 'Even the light that verily is God, if I take it where it plays upon my soul is foreign to Him. I must take it at the source. I cannot really see the light that shines upon the wall unless I turn my gaze to where it comes from. But if I take it in its cause I am robbed of its effect. I ought to take it neither where it falls nor in its eruption nor yet as brooding in itself; these are all mere modes. We must take God in modeless mode and unconditioned essence, for He is free from mode.' Let us admit an absolute truth of this kind. The closest approximations to it are the generally accepted myths. Myths are the earthly vicars of the truth. They change and grow. They mature and fade. The myths embodied in Christian belief are more true to-day than they were at the time of the ecumenical councils which authorised them in the form of those little mnemonic jingles, the creeds and the catechism. And at the point at which they attain their closest approximation to the truth, they will no doubt be finally abandoned.

That time is not yet. No sufficient counter-myth has yet grown up. The Utopian myths, of which the most effective so far is the communist, have not yet achieved the state in which a man can fully adhere to them with the whole of his faculties. They are insufficiently rich in 'residues'. They still permit argument. I quote Dmitri Merejkowsky. 'If you listen to disputation, to dialectic, you are inclined to

argue yourself ; but if you listen to myth, you are silent and recall the paradisal songs of the Angel, sung to all souls before birth.' About a myth, one does not argue. One attacks and undermines it with private fictions. But lies also mature. Some of the most outrageous lies in the course of time become truths, thereby confounding the liar.

The course of literary history is a commentary upon the evolution of myths. Its elucidation is known as literary criticism, with which are associated changes in public taste. I quote Oscar Wilde, in *Intentions*. ' Each new school, as it appears, cries out against criticism, but it is to the critical faculty in man that it owes its origin. The mere creative instinct does not innovate, but reproduces.' Schools are, to be sure, the product of criticism, and a school is a temporary front against the more original and headstrong liars of the day. A school is criticism operating prematurely. A school merely reproduces. The lie of fiction is critical in respect of a myth. The creative instinct which merely reproduces has nothing to do with literature at all. These biological analogies simply do not work.

Is it therefore sufficient for a writer to lie brazenly and leave the rest to his critic and posterity ? Unfortunately, it is not. A man has only so many lies in him, and the vigour of his lying depends upon the depth of his respect for the truth. Unbridled liars, such as Marinetti, Mayakovsky, Rimbaud, D. H. Lawrence, the Surréalistes, Céline, Henry Miller, destroy themselves. Afflicted with a kind of neurasthenia, they are quickly spent. After one big visit to town, they vomit up the stolen apples and are finished.

It is not the extent of the lie which counts, but the tension between the lie and the truth, the fiction and the established myth. In a book on D. H. Lawrence, Mr. J. Middleton Murry, a first-rate critic who later took it into his head to lie on his own account and chose the wrong medium, wrote as follows. ' Unless society is an organic unity, in which the artist feels and knows himself spiritually secure, the undisturbed concentration of his artistic faculty upon the created object is impossible. The necessary condition of great art

is that the artist should be able to take elemental things for granted. . . . The artist to-day finds no spiritual authority which he instinctively acknowledges. If he acknowledges any it is the authority of Art itself, which is mere wordy nonsense. . . . The artist who is conscious enough to be capable of great art is inevitably involved in the endeavour to discover or to create the authority without which his activity as artist is either trivial or anarchic.' In other words, a liar is lost without truth.

But the truth shall make you free. And it may be that the most powerful fecundators of twentieth-century agnosticism will be Catholics, that our greatest republicans will lie beneath the royalist flag, as Kierkegaard, the greatest doubter in two thousand years, has proved a pillar of strength to that most tottering edifice, the Church of England. The primary needs of literature are balance and tension. Too much intellect and self-criticism produce a drought of abstraction. Too much feeling, too great a wealth of 'residues' accompanied by no 'instinct of combinations', produce a rainy season in which the fires of the mind are put out. Lack of 'residues' plus general illiteracy produce the bulk of contemporary poetry. As Kant said, 'Categories without intuition are empty, intuitions without category are blind'. A great belief and a great unbelief must flourish together. And we may be assured that it cannot imperil our agnostic and republican consciences to go to bed with the works of Paul Claudel.

Chapter Five

A CONVERSION

RIMBAUD, AFFLICTED FROM BIRTH WITH provincial boredom, seized greedily at the fruits of art, made himself ill and betook himself to a life of action in a distant climate. Claudel, after a peaceful, opulent and varied youth, became a traveller and a writer at the same time. He carried his Abyssinia with him, and no fissure opened in his life. It is the better way. Unfortunately, it cannot be enjoined or at any rate prescribed, the accidents of birth, upbringing and talent being what they are.

At a glance, Claudel has been so conspicuously fortune's darling that it is a wonder he ever wrote at all or that he wrote anything but elegant trifles. And indeed the hallmark of the elegant trifle may be faintly detected upon all his mature work. After the first period of youthful anguish, a certain virtuosity, a playfulness, a nonchalance and a deliberate limitation of the territory upon which pity is allowed to stray, the characteristics of those who know that good fortune is private and unassailable and can afford to smile at the confusion of the others outside the gate, are present in his most serious work. Yet that the work is serious has never been in doubt.

Throughout his career, Claudel has run true to form. The mild agnosticism of his parents and his schoolmasters was the only factor in his early environment which required, at the time of adolescence, a spasmodic catching-up with himself. And so we have a clearly dated conversion and a series of turbulent, early works. After that, everything is straightforward, and Claudel's world is governed by the traditional pieties.

A single legend current in the family contains the leading themes of a life's work. A great-aunt of the poet relinquished her son to the church in pursuance of a vow made when she

concealed a priest during the Revolution. This son, Claudel's uncle on his mother's side, was parish priest of Villeneuve-sur-Fère-en-Tardenois when he died in 1869, the year after his nephew's birth. From his tomb, adjoining the church, sprang ivy which grew through the wall and into the sealed arch. Pledges occupy a most significant place in many of Claudel's plays, conspicuously the broken pledge in *The Hostage*, the kept pledge in *The Satin Slipper*. In *The Hostage*, the central plot concerns the hiding of a priest (but the priest is magnified to a pope). In *The Tidings Brought to Mary*, we find the sympathetic plant.

' *Un grand lierre noir*

' *Sort de la tombe sacerdotale et traversant le mur*

' *Pénètre jusque l'arche scellée.*'

Claudel's religion is Catholic romanticism at its least bashful. Family legend, patriotic legend, ancient and little-authenticated miracles, pledges, intrigues, gallantry, beautiful, chaste and fatal heroines, sword-play and violent death constitute the favourite world of Paul-Louis-Charles-Marie Claudel. Little wonder that he fell heavily for Franco in 1936. Little wonder that he made a 'successful' French ambassador in many countries for many years. And yet let us be scrupulously fair and remember that in 1936 Claudel was already an old man of close on seventy and that he did not fall quite so heavily for Pétain's Arcadian simplicity four years later, since, although he may have dedicated a poem to Pétain, he dedicated one also to de Gaulle and did not in any way compromise himself with the Germans. Indeed, according to Mr. Charles Morgan, he is now so well regarded on all hands that he functions with Eluard and Aragon on behalf of the C.N.E. (*Sunday Times*, July 14, 1946). Let us also not imagine for a moment that by uncovering the roots of Claudel's private vision we have seen something to the discredit of his poetry and drama. For Claudel is a poet of the very purest quality. No French poet of his generation was at all widely or seriously proposed as a rival, except Valéry. And Claudel may also be regarded as the midwife or, more properly, sick-nurse of a second remarkable talent,

for it was he who in 1905 saw Francis Jammes through his religious difficulties.

The heroic quality in life depends upon clear-cut distinctions. These need not by any means be wholly logical in origin. On the contrary, they should be of the nature of the Paretan 'residues', but their 'derivations' should be scrupulously exact. The 'instinct of combinations' rarely inflames men to the point of violence. Fanaticism is stronger in political and religious conservatives than in their opponents, which is no doubt why the Left, like England, loses every battle but the last. A man filled at once with Catholic and patriotic 'residues' will adhere to their 'derivations' with psychopathic tenacity. The discipline of his art no doubt cooled Claudel himself, but his characters are very hot. In the penumbra of the modern world, their movements display all the stylised extravagance of the ballet, the art of total extraversion. Merely to give the name of a sin or a virtue to the most transient impulse heightens and clarifies all the qualities of existence. The Claudel stage is bathed in a brilliant, flat light. His actors exhibit what is never to be found for a moment in Bloy, Bernanos or Mauriac—namely, *glamour*.

In *The East as I Know It*, Claudel characterises the childhood vision which was to grow to a curiously world-wide, God's-eye focus, fully worked out in *The Satin Slipper*. Even in his first youth he was fascinated by Christopher Columbus and wished to unite scattered worlds. He climbed trees and, from a height, 'like a God on his stalk, a spectator in the theatre of the world . . . considered the relief and conformation of the earth, the disposition of its contours and its horizontal plan . . . missing nothing, neither the direction of the smoke, nor the quality of light and shade, the stage reached by the work in the fields, the shots of the hunters'. This agoraphilia, this altitudinous, map-maker's vision is with him from start to finish of his life's work.

An agnostic schooling in the shadow of Renan, and then comes the conversion. By-passing this for the moment, let us summarise the biographical data in tabular form. The

mere *curriculum vitae* has in Claudel's case an uncommon relevance to his work.

1893. First diplomatic appointments, New York and Boston. *L'Echange.*

1894. Shanghai. Reading St. Thomas Aquinas.

1895. *Vers d'Exil.*

1896. Foochow. *Le Repos du Septième Jour.*

1900. Syria, Palestine, France. Retreat at Ligugé, oblate. Francis Jammes, André Gide. *The East as I Know It. Développement de l'Eglise.*

1901. Foochow, Japan, Indo-China.

1903. Kuliang. *Connaissance du Temps.*

1905. France. Conversion of Francis Jammes. Marriage of Claudel. Pekin.

1906. *Partage de Midi.*

1907. Tientsin. Conversion of Jacques Rivière. Daughter, Marie, born. *Art poétique.*

1910. Prague. *The Hostage. The Tidings Brought to Mary. Cinq grandes odes.*

1911. Conversion of Charles Péguy. Frankfurt-am-Main. Darius Milhaud.

1912. *The Tidings Brought to Mary* produced in Paris. *Le Chemin de la Croix.*

1913. Hamburg. *The Tidings Brought to Mary* produced in Germany, *The Hostage* in Paris. *Protée.*

1914. Driven out of Hamburg at the outbreak of war. Bordeaux.

1915. Rome. *Le Pain dur. La Nuit de Noël de 1914. Trois poèmes de guerre.*

1916. *Le Père humilié. Corona benigitatis anni Dei.*

1917. Rio de Janeiro. Milhaud. *L'Ours et la Lune.*

1918. *La Messe là-bas.*

1920. Copenhagen.

1921. Tokio. *Un coup d'oeil sur l'âme japonaise.*

1923. Great earthquake in Japan. French consulate destroyed. Claudel's embassy intact. *Sainte Geneviève.*

1924. *The Satin Slipper.*

1925. *Feuilles de Saints. Positions et Propositions.*

- 1927. Washington. *L'Oiseau noir dans le soleil levant.*
- 1928. Negotiated the Kellogg Pact.
- 1930. *Christopher Columbus.*
- 1933. Brussels.
- 1934. *Ecoute, ma fille. Positions et Propositions, II.*
- 1935. Non-election to the Académie. Resignation from the *corps diplomatique*. *Salut à la Belgique.*

To this there is little to add except that the Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936 and that my last personal bulletin came in a letter from Jean Paulhan, who writes, ' *Claudel va bien : à peine un peu sourd*'.

' TO TURN TO MANZONI, THE ASCENT TO A truth not previously possessed by him was unquestionable in his case, since by this conversion he broke away from the arid rationalism and intellectualism of the eighteenth century, in which as a young man he was contentedly educated, and embraced the far more serious conceptions of Christianity, embodied in the Catholic Church. But of the motives of feeling which led him to this and not another mode of ascent, to reject eighteenth-century rationalism without correcting it and forming a profound and not intellectualistic but concrete idea of reason and spirituality, this being the way trodden out by others in his time, of these motives of feeling no logical explanation can be given precisely because they were emotional and not logical. And neither others nor Manzoni himself can furnish any such explanation of what happened to him on that day in 1810 in the church of St. Roch in Paris, and whose "imprinted passion" he bore forever, without his mind being able to turn back and assign causes or logical process which were not and could not have been either pure or complete. It only remained for him to attribute the event in the usual way to "grace", and it only remains for us to note the fact like any other mental or emotional fact' (*Pensieri vari*, 1943). Thus Croce on the conversion of Alessandro Manzoni, and it will cover equally what happened to Paul Claudel on Christmas Day, 1886, in the church of

Notre-Dame. If there is one thing certain about the mystical experience, whenever and wherever it may take place, it is that it does not contain in itself any specific metaphysical implications, that phrases like 'a state of unutterable bliss' are the most concrete descriptions its victims are ever able to give of it and that 'grace' or whatever other religious symbols are subsequently fitted to it are unmistakably cases of retrospective attribution. If God appears, it is 'in modeless mode and unconditioned essence'. The circumstances amid which the experience took place are certain to colour its memory afterwards, however, and if one is attacked in a Catholic church, why, then, it is the most natural thing in the world to conclude that the truth of the Catholic faith has been directly imparted.

Claudel has been reasonably garrulous about his own conversion. The account was first published in the *Revue de la Jeunesse*, almost thirty years after the event, in 1913. *Colosseum* carried an English translation in 1935. 'Et ô ces voix d'enfants chantant dans la coupole. . . .' 'I was just beginning to write,' says Claudel, 'and thought that Catholic ceremonies, if treated with a sort of superior dilettantism, would provide me with both stimulus and copy for a few decadent exercises in verse. It was in this mood, and jostled hither and thither by the crowd, that I attended High Mass and it provided only a doubtful pleasure. Then, having nothing better to do, I returned for Vespers. There were children from the choir-school dressed in white, and some students from the Petit Séminaire of St. Nicholas-du-Chardonnet were helping them to sing what I later discovered to be the *Magnificat*. I myself was standing in the crowd near the second pillar at the entrance to the choir on the right of the sacristy. It was then that the event took place which revolutionised my whole life. Suddenly my heart was touched and I BELIEVED. I believed with such power, with such force of my whole being, with a conviction that was so overwhelming and a certainty that shut out so completely any tiniest doubt—that nothing since, neither books nor reasoning nor the vicissitudes of an extremely varied life,

has been able to shake or even to touch my faith. I was overcome with a sudden and overwhelming sense of the innocence and the eternal infancy of God—an inexpressible revelation.

' When I have tried, as I often have, to reconstruct the minutes which followed this extraordinary moment, I have isolated the following elements which, however, simply formed a single flash of illumination, a single weapon which Divine Providence used in order to force an opening into the heart of a poor despairing child. " How happy the people are who can believe ! Supposing it were true, though ? It is true ! God exists. He is there. It's someone. It's a Being as personal as myself. He loves me and calls me." Tears flowed and my sobs mingled with the singing of the *Adeste* which increased my emotion. It was a tender emotion, but an emotion not unmixed with fear and something very much resembling horror ! For my philosophical opinions remained intact. God had contemptuously left them where they were. I could see nothing to change. The Catholic religion still seemed to me to be the same treasure-house of absurd fairy stories. Its priests and faithful filled me with exactly the same aversion as before—an aversion which was not far from disgust. The fabric of my opinions and knowledge remained standing and I could not see the slightest fault in it. And yet I had found the way out. A new person, making the most terrifying demands on the young man and the artist that I was, had revealed himself and refused to be reconciled with any of the things that surrounded me. I was like a man whose skin has been torn off with a single movement and who finds himself planted inside a strange body in the middle of an unknown world ; that is the only comparison I can find to express my state of complete dereliction. Everything that was most repugnant to my opinions and tastes had turned out to be true, and I had to adapt myself to it whether I liked it or not.'

There were four years of resistance, fortified by the reading of Rimbaud and Baudelaire. *Tête d'Or* and *La Ville* were written. Pascal, Dante and Aristotle were studied. The

modeless was modified and the essence conditioned. A career singularly devoid of torment had begun. Thirty years were now to be devoted to travel, administration, domesticity and the steady unfolding of a talent to the degree of amplitude at which it became a vehicle for *The Satin Slipper*. It was said of the leaping of a certain Nicolas Petrovitch Damashov, who never danced outside Russia, that there came a point in his leap at which he appeared to hesitate in mid-air before rising to the limit of his elevation. The Claudel trajectory betrays a similar flattening, which lasted four years from *Partage de Midi* to *The Tidings Brought to Mary* and *The Hostage*. Followed a slight loss of altitude and then the final parabola of which *The Satin Slipper* marks the highest point.

Chapter Six

THE PLAYGROUND OF PAUL CLAUDEL

TÈTE D'OR, PUBLISHED IN TWO VERSIONS, ONE completed in 1889, the other in 1895, is not merely unplayable but unreadable, and indeed it is probably more unreadable than unplayable, for as a stage-piece it at least provides opportunities for spectacle. It is in effect a pantomime with words—a wholly disproportionate number of words. Anybody proposing to make a study of the play would do well to begin by reading merely the stage-directions. In any future edition, these ought to be printed separately and consecutively. They contain the whole play. They could be mimed splendidly by Kurt Jooss or a Central European school of dance. This is a perfectly serious tip to any choreographer short of a scenario, and I would suggest music by Gustav Mahler or Anton Bruckner. The spoken text is an impossible burden to the play. The satisfactory criticism of it is likewise impossible. I might quote a hundred lines or so of one speech and point out that there are so many dozen speeches like this given to each of so many characters, the whole of them monotonously expressing the same '*désespoir suffoquant*', as Wladimir Weidlé so aptly characterises it. Such endlessly brooding, Teutonic verbosity had previously appeared only once in the course of French literature, and that was in *Les Burgraves* by Victor Hugo, a poet whom Claudel has always held in particular abhorrence, but whose cast of Methuselahs in this his worst play appear like winged Ariels beside the characters of *Tête d'Or*.

'Restez avec moi, Seigneur, parce que le soir approche, et ne m'abandonnez pas !'

'Ne me perdez pas avec les Voltaire, et les Renan, et les Michelet, et les Hugo et tous les autres infâmes !'

These two ungracious versets can be hurled in Claudel's

teeth at several points in his career, as I shall have occasion to point out in connection with Renan and *The Hostage*.

However, let us prepare the scenario for our imaginary ballet. It will be seen that it is the allegorical foreshadowing of a theme which Claudel was later to treat more or less straightforwardly in a politico-historical trilogy. *Tête d'Or* is a peasant, at first called Simon Agnel. When the curtain rises, he is seen staggering on to a twilight stage with a dead woman over his shoulder and a spade in his hand. He proceeds to dig a grave, and after a while a young man called Cébès, who has been standing at the front of the stage lamenting the horror of life, observes and joins him, and it is revealed that the dead woman had been loved by Cébès too but had run away from the village to join Simon Agnel in his wanderings. The woman buried, Cébès and Simon Agnel walk through the night. How, on any but a revolving stage, they are meant to walk so far, I do not know. They meet the dead woman's father, his wits long ago addled with grief, and presently settle down to a prolonged swearing of brotherhood, during which Agnel or *Tête d'Or* holds Cébès' head against his bosom and *bleeds* upon him, from what wound is not indicated, possibly from the nose. Simon Agnel is the man of will, Cébès the creature of sensibility.

In the second part of the play, Agnel, henceforward known as *Tête d'Or* (for a reason presently revealed), has roused the people of a despairing country and marched them off to battle. Cébès is lying sick in bed in the King's palace. The King also is mad with grief. Lying about the floor like Henry Moore's tube-shelterers are a number of sleeping forms, ironically known as the Watchers. They have come to the palace 'to watch and pray' and perhaps represent the church. The King rouses them, and they curse him. The Princess enters. The most effective passage in the play is a pantomime in which the Princess now dresses up in a bright red garment too big for her and, standing midway between light and darkness, conjures up the beauty of the world, momentarily fires the King, Cébès and the Watchers, but then herself falls into despair. A messenger arrives. *Tête d'Or* has won a great

victory. *Tête d'Or* enters to the sound of trumpets. Cébès, who has refused water until his blood-brother's return, now drinks, but dies. Follows an anti-masque in which a crowd gathers about the Tribune of the People, the Pedagogue, Officers of State and other figures indicative of Franco-Roman republicanism at its worst. They dispute the victory among themselves, ignoring *Tête d'Or*, who, however, throws his sword to them and tames them all by sheer force of personality, kills the King and drives the Princess away. As he takes off his helmet, long, yellow hair falls about his shoulders, and the cry is raised that he is a woman. This he denies. The precise significance of the passage escapes me, but it is clear that in some way *Tête d'Or* represents Napoleon.

In the third part of the play, he ceases to be both Simon Agnel and *Tête d'Or* and becomes simply the King. The scene is the Caucasus (Napoleon's Russian campaign? Prometheus and therefore Aeschylus?). The Princess, clad in skins, lies down to sleep on the bare ground. *Tête d'Or* enters with his officers, some of whom again bear Roman titles. One is called Cassius, another the Centurion. The Princess is discovered but unrecognised. *Tête d'Or* gives her his ration of bread. He and his men go out. The Deserter appears from behind a bush. He formerly worked in the royal kitchen. He snatches the bread from the Princess and presently nails her to a fir-tree by the hands. The officers return and hoist *Tête d'Or*, wounded and dying, over a precipice. They make him comfortable and leave him. He and the Princess, in their several predicaments, recognise each other. *Tête d'Or* staggers to the tree and pulls out the nails. The Princess drags him back to where he was lying. The officers return. *Tête d'Or* dies, saying that the Princess shall be made Queen. She is crowned by the officers and immediately dies. The officers briefly lament her and march away, crying, '*En avant!*' Final curtain.

It is only fair to add that a number of French critics still treat *Tête d'Or* as one of Claudel's more important works. I can only suggest that they have been impressed by mere size and persistency. The worst of Hugo, the worst of Wagner,

the worst of Maeterlinck and the worst of Leconte de Lisle have gone to the making of *Tête d'Or*, and out of it, as out of a shaggy German mountain trembling and giving birth to an exquisite little clockwork mouse, have perhaps crept the *Plays for Dancers* of a poet at once finer and less great than Claudel, W. B. Yeats.

For Claudel himself, psychologically (read, if you prefer it, 'spiritually'), this '*drame de l'ambition déçue*' (Louis Chaigne) appears to deal more honestly, if to less purpose, with a conflict explicitly confessed in respect of *The Hostage*. In Claudel's family were both aristocratic and bourgeois elements. The *ancien régime*, the first, second and third republics and the two empires battled in him (as they no doubt battle in every Frenchman). In *The Hostage*, as we shall see, the scales have been heavily tipped in favour of the *ancien régime*. A point of view has been cultivated and the native vision falsified. A certain myopia has been corrected by the aid of lenses which have unfortunately caused astigmatism to develop.

LET US COMPARE THE MIND OF THE ADOLESCENT Claudel to a pool of water. It stands in a hollow of the earth of Champagne, surrounded by pleasant trees, full of amiable fish. But it is not proper that the mind of an adolescent should remain undisturbed. A stagnant film begins to form. And so comes love to trouble the waters, to form a stream running into the pool from the fields surrounding it. But in Claudel's case it is not love which enters horizontally from the periphery. It is religion dropped into the pool vertically. Dropped? Hurled, rather. Hurled like a meteorite or like the great stone which the angel of the Revelation of St. John hurled sizzling into the sea and which Mr. H. S. Bellamy believes to have been the lost continent of Atlantis, though it is called Babylon. The pool is not slowly changed in composition by the stream that flows into it. It is blasted. It hisses. Mud is churned up. Dead fish float to the surface. The author of *Tête d'Or* is born. The dead fish are presently

drawn to the bank and turned into manure. *La Ville* and *L'Echange* show the mud progressively settling. *Le Repos du Septième Jour* is the mirror of a mind disturbed only by the electrical tremor of its talent and the centrifugal rippling that results from natural stones thrown in by human agencies, stirring up no mud.

Thus, *La Ville* is more lucid than *Tête d'Or*, but it is still full of débris. The first version was written in 1890 and published anonymously. The second version was written in 1897 and at the time was thought by a number of discriminating people to be inferior. This I have from Mr. T. S. Eliot, in conversation.

The general theme of *La Ville* is the horror of the human city and the mood that of destruction and apocalypse, the 'slaughter-work' of Jehovah's witnesses. The chief characters are an engineer, Besmes, who is the creator of the city, Cœuvre, a poet and Lâla, a woman. Lâla is the adopted daughter of Besmes's brother, to whom at the opening of the play she is also engaged to be married. This fore-echo of Freud and the newly discovered Oedipus situation can hardly, by the date, have been a conscious one. There is also a character called '*Avare*', that is, 'Miser'. He is not a miser in the received sense, and his symbolic value is not clearly brought out. In *L'Echange* and *Le Repos du Septième Jour*, '*avare*' occurs frequently as a common noun or an adjective and indicates, especially in the latter play, the man who wishes to live in and to himself. It may be, however, that the name was chosen purely for its sound—in consciousness at least. The most significant utterance of *Avare* in *La Ville* is a speech at the beginning of the second act in which he gives expression to what evidence elsewhere teaches us to regard as Claudel's own point of view, a point of view since widely canvassed by distributists, anarchists, Christian pacifists, sentimental medievalists and a number of politicians who are up to no good.

'Formerly the workman held his work in his hands in its entirety;

'And as the heart gladdens at the sight of colour,

'Finding beauty in his work, he was happy in the work itself'

‘ And knowing the buyer, he had a particular person in mind.
 ‘ But to-day all the grace of the work, and all honour, and all genius, have been taken away from him.

‘ And the aim of a man is no longer to satisfy another man, but to cater for general needs,

‘ And the only merit of his work is its utility, and machines do it for him.’

In *Tête d'Or*, the language is a mere encrustation upon the action or at best a symphonic accompaniment to it.¹ - *La Ville* is more integrated, but the action is itself either negligible or obscure.

In the first act, Lâla leaves Besmes's brother for Cœuvre, the poet. Her adopted father and rejected lover renounces the world. At the point at which his decision is made, delegates have arrived to say that the city is in danger and to invite Besmes's brother to become its ruler. The First Delegate gives expression to one of Claudel's neater attacks on the modern world.

‘ All authority comes from the common people.

‘ And each year it gives so much

‘ Money for the business of governing, so that a man may live in peace with his neighbour, and the cut-throat may not take away his belongings, and the roads may be kept in repair.

‘ A treasury is thus constituted, the feeble obey, and ransoms are paid to the strong, great and vexatious ransoms.

‘ But each man wishes to be one of those who profit and the State cannot meet its expenses.’

There is, at the point at which Lâla turns to Cœuvre, a fetichistic pantomime similar to that of the Princess and the scarlet robe in *Tête d'Or*. Cœuvre at first rejects Lâla. She prostrates herself, and he places his foot upon her. She then

¹ It would, of course, be equally possible to argue that the language is the important thing and the action only a rather feeble support, but it so happens that in this essay we are more concerned with plot than with language. The point is that the language of *Tête d'Or*, with all its power and magnificence, is separate and that the separable parts of the play do not belong to each other by natural affinity.

tells the bystander to cover her with a veil which she has brought. Cœuvre accepts her veiled and loves her with adoration when the veil is removed.

In the second act, Besmes's brother has become a grave-digger in the near-by cemetery. Lâla returns to him, having in the meantime borne a child to Cœuvre. Lâla justifies her fickleness in a speech on the nature of a woman's being which is to form the dominant theme of the next play, *L'Echange*. 'Woman', she says, 'is closer to the earth than you are.' Cœuvre and Besmes enter. Avare is planning the destruction of the city. Lâla appeals to him. She appeals also to Cœuvre. They refuse her, and she goes away. Besmes's brother goes behind a gravestone to die. The fate of Besmes, the city's creator, is the point to which the action is now leading, Besmes justifies himself in nominalist and empirical terms, which also foreshadow Heidegger.

'Everything is inexplicable. And what is this hunger to know which devours the spirit

'But the appetite to exhaust that which is inessential ?

'Everything is, in virtue of its difference ; and rests, individual, upon an incommunicable principle.

'Where you see Causes and Laws (setting up the capital letter like an idol),

'I no longer find anything but the exercise of an instrument. Logical necessity is the only kind,

'Included within the statement of the object ; any explanation

'Merely expands the definition, an abstract image of the fact.

'I call the ground of all things Nothingness, totally inaccessible to our spiritual capacity. And that is why,

'Accustomed to handle the most deeply hidden forces,

'It was my project to substitute for knowledge contact, to surprise Being in its operation, laying a trap for it.

'I mingle this thought with the obscurity of Death.'

The crowd is heard off. The stage empties. Over a wall at the back of the stage appear flags, rifle-barrels and finally the head of Besmes on a bayonet.

Act Three takes place amid the ruins of the city. New characters appear. *Avare* is the country's master. One of the new characters is the son of *Avare*, *Ivors* (it should be noted that in normal French pronunciation the two names differ only in their vowel sounds). *Avare* renounces his destroyed world, and *Ivors* is left. *Ivors* expresses the political philosophy of the extreme right. Enter *Cœuvre*, dressed as a bishop. Thus the poet restores the hierarchy. Thus Claudel completes *Barrès* and *Maurras*. We are in an imagined future from which the church has disappeared. And yet the situation is one which has occurred in the past and to which Claudel will presently devote a trilogy of plays.

‘Oats are growing in the holy water basins and nettles thrust out of the tabernacles.

‘We do not know what has become of religion. Not even whether there is a pope; the last old man they had

‘Long since closed his eyes in which many candles were reflected,

‘Like a clean page under the lamp.’

This clearly anticipates the lines in *The Hostage* which André Gide later took as his epigraph to *Les Caves du Vatican*, thereby considerably estranging Claudel, his former friend.

‘But what king do you mean, and what pope?

‘For there are two, and nobody knows which is the right one.’

L'ECHANGE WAS WRITTEN IN 1893, IN AMERICA. The previous year, Claudel had completed the first version of *La Jeune Fille Violaine*, later to become, in its third version, *The Tidings Brought to Mary*, his accepted masterpiece. *L'Echange* has the framework of a naughty domestic comedy. Since, in 1893, domestic comedies had not yet become one quarter so naughty as *L'Echange* would have been had it remained merely a domestic comedy, Claudel must be credited with writing at least thirty years ahead of his time. More than thirty. For the Laurentian view of life with which Claudel invests his framework has not even yet appeared

upon the commercial stage, and Hollywood at its most sophisticated is only now beginning to give us the skeleton upon which, in the 'nineties, Claudel had already moulded a rich upholstery of language.

In its situation, *L'Echange* anticipates *Private Lives*. A young French married couple are living on the American coast, probably in New England. The wife, Marthe, is a few years older than the husband, Louis. Louis might be almost any young man from a play by Noel Coward or a novel by Aldous Huxley or Evelyn Waugh. He dislikes the bondage of matrimony. He fears to have children or to earn money. Marthe is a simple provincial girl. She loves Louis, but is unhappy in this sophisticated or at any rate luxurious exile.

The American pair are Thomas Pollock, a business magnate, and Léchy, an actress. Léchy seduces Louis. Thomas Pollock pays Louis to relinquish his rights in Marthe. But for Marthe's puritanical singleness of heart, the exchange might be perfect. Marthe indeed sees before the end of the play that Thomas Pollock is a more admirable type than Louis, because he knows what he wants and works for it. If the play had been written during the last ten years, she would have said no doubt that Thomas Pollock was 'at least a *man*'. Unfortunately, Marthe's discovery comes too late. In a drunken orgy of destruction, Léchy sets fire to Thomas Pollock's house and, seeing that he will leave her too, ties Louis to his horse, which runs wild and kills him. Marthe is left to the traditional pieties of widowhood.

The dialogue is disconcerting to an English reader. English phrases are introduced here and there, and they are in general as inept as the French phrases which occur in English novels. Thomas Pollock leads into a large number of his remarks by saying, 'Well !' Occasionally, he rounds them off with, 'Lots of fun !' or, 'No fun at all !' But the play is predominantly a hymn to womankind. Marthe is the simple, integrated woman of sound instinct, Léchy the malicious, denatured product of the contemporary world. The voices of Lawrence and William Blake sound continually through the lips of Marthe. 'He for God only, she for God through him,'

is the key-note. It is echoed towards the end of the play, for instance, when Marthe says, ' We do not see God ; but we see man who is the image of God, and shall we not praise the sun which permits us to see and to look at this ? ' Into Marthe's mouth, too, Claudel puts a great deal of his own lyrical nostalgia as, on the coast of this ' land discovered on the far side of the rain ', he looks across the Atlantic towards Europe and towards France, where he remembers wheat and grape, the lark glorifying God, the sun at ten o'clock, poppies in the rye, the first violets, the smell of dead leaves and peacocks picking up sunflower seeds.

LE REPOS DU SEPTIÈME JOUR WAS WRITTEN IN China in 1895 and 1896. It exists in only one version. It followed immediately upon a translation of the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus, completed at Boston in 1894 and printed at Foochow in 1896.

The debt of Claudel to the Greeks and especially to Aeschylus has been laboured by a number of critics. In an article called ' L'Eclosion du Drame ', written for the special Claudel homages number of the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, December 1936, the Russian émigré critic, Wladimir Weidlé, states this debt to the Greeks in a fascinating and unusual manner. ' The fourth "Ode", the "Cantata for Three Voices", show how drama is, at any moment, ready to be born out of the poem. . . . If we consider that other cantata for three voices, the epilogue to *The Tidings Brought to Mary*, we shall see that here too the central movement of Claudelian drama remains in essence a lyrical movement. . . . It is a question of "jaillissement", of "jet poétique", whose embracing rhythm constitutes the unities formulated retrospectively by Aristotle. The very intensity of the *jet poétique* forces upon us the creation of drama, lyricism, having attained a certain degree of tension, spontaneously generates the "different voices" of these "persons together in my heart". . . . But is it not this "Thou" which is most to the point, this "Thou", this invasion by the other-than-myself,

without which there is no drama, and must we not regard the introduction of the second actor by Aeschylus as a religious act ? ' This is a line of thought which could yield extraordinary critical results, and has indeed already done so in M. Weidlé's only book, *Les Abeilles d'Aristée*. In no dramatist as in Claudel is the division between dramatic and lyrical poetry so little marked. The same verset is used throughout, and this of itself has a peculiar importance. The normal way of printing verse and the normal way of printing prose make it impossible to move from one to the other without a clear typographical point of transition. Claudel sets out the line of verse as if it were a paragraph of prose in miniature. The versets may be lengthened imperceptibly into prose periods. This little trick of typography—probably regarded by many of his early readers as an affectation of the same kind as the lack of punctuation or the lack of initial capitals in a great deal of contemporary verse—must have played a very considerable part in Claudel's evolution. This apparently chancy mechanism will remind many of Beethoven on diminished sevenths.

I must, at the same time, insist that in the first act of *Le Repos du Septième Jour* one is more properly reminded of Sophocles than of Aeschylus. It is in *Œdipus Rex* that we are shown the most awe-inspiring picture of a city haunted by the sense of doom and appealing to its ruler for help. In *Œdipus Rex*, the people are pursued by the occult consequences of some unclean evil in their midst. In *Le Repos du Septième Jour*, they are hag-ridden by the spirits of the dead, who disturb their most intimate practices and contaminate their food, as the Chinese themselves were no doubt still disposed to believe at the close of the last century. In *Œdipus Rex*, the city's ruler forces the truth out of old men who are still alive and, when it is known, blinds himself with a brooch-pin before leaving the city to go into voluntary exile. In *Le Repos du Septième Jour*, the Chinese Emperor goes down into the underworld to interrogate the dead and returns to earth with his eyes gnawed away by death. He announces his discoveries and returns to the underworld of his own free will.

Another source which I have not seen mentioned may reasonably be found in the mystery and morality plays of the Middle Ages. *Le Repos du Septième Jour* is *The Harrowing of Hell* in reverse. Where, in the one, Christ descends into the underworld and announces the new dispensation, in the other the Emperor descends, receives the news and brings it back to earth. For what he brings back is specifically the injunction to rest from work on the sabbath, but it is in general the whole reign of grace. In the underworld, the Angel of the Empire announces the Advent that was announced to Virgil in the *Aeneid*. The Demon formulates the doctrine of original sin. The imperial baton puts forth leaf and branch like Tannhäuser's staff and becomes the cross. The whole play may have been motivated in a subsidiary degree as a mission to the Chinese. The royalist theme is also represented. As soon as the Emperor is away, sedition begins on earth. It is quickly settled by the investiture of a prince.

The ruler who assumes the sins and misfortunes of his people will remind us of some of the considerations in Chapter II. The plagued city as a tragic theme has been revived more recently still in the play by Jean-Paul Sartre which is said to have constituted the outstanding event in the French theatre under German occupation, *Les Mouches*. Produced in Paris in 1943, *Les Mouches* takes us to the Argos of Aeschylus and exhibits Orestes and Electra, the children of Agamemnon, in a parable on the nature of human liberty. The Furies are flies which torment the people of Argos in much the same way as the spirits of the dead in *Le Repos du Septième Jour*. Sartre, moreover, introduces a festival of the raising of the dead, at which the spirits of the dead infest the city for twenty-four hours. In *Le Repos du Septième Jour*, the freedom of Christ and rest from work are the answer to the city's plight. In *Les Mouches*, the answer is, and its boldness in the Paris of 1943 ought not to be forgotten, that men abase themselves and protest their guilt out of the fear of freedom and that Orestes, the Prince, will take all this guilt-consciousness upon himself and leave the people free. The belief that a hitherto unacknowledged debt has been

contracted here is fortified when we observe that Sartre's other play, *Huis-Clos*, takes us, like the second act of *Le Repos du Septième Jour*, to the underworld, where the blindness of the dead is reversed and becomes an inability to close the eyes. I have already quoted one statement of Claudel's which, to my mind, anticipates Martin Heidegger, who is also Sartre's philosophical master. These fore-echoes abound. The senior French existentialist, Gabriel Marcel, is, like Claudel, a Catholic and a playwright. This is a deep pocket of domestic and foreign influences for some minute critic to turn out.

Le Repos du Septième Jour is best regarded as an unfinished masterpiece. Whether Claudel finished it to his own satisfaction at the time, he has not told us, but certainly the latter half of the last act appears to exist merely in the form of elaborate notes. That in the printed text a line is ruled across the page, a narrator ('*récitant*') introduced, a change of scene promised and not given, suggest that the play was in fact abandoned rather than finished. It is a pity. It is not difficult to see the mechanical problems which arose. When at the beginning of the third act the Emperor returns to earth, he wears a golden mask. When this is removed, it is seen that his eyes and nose are eaten away (it is stated to be leprosy, so we may suppose that leprosy for Claudel signifies death and that this is its allegorical purport also in *The Tidings Brought to Mary*, where it constitutes a major theme). Only the mouth is still alive, the mouth which is to enunciate the saving news. Since this news is already made explicit by the Angel of the Empire in the second act, we may consider the action complete as soon as the Emperor has taken off the golden mask and shown his ravaged face. It remains only for him to announce his decision to return voluntarily to the shades. This exhibition of the face takes place very early in the third act, so that what we have in effect is a play in two acts with epilogue, padded out to three acts.

I quote M. Weidlé again, this time giving expression to a less individual point of view, if not indeed to a critical commonplace. 'From the point of view of normal dramaturgy . . . Claudelian drama . . . lacks action, movement,

'the sense of plot, agility in the dialogue, the slick scenic strategy which aims at keeping the most somnolent spectator awake, and that display of everyday psychology which gives us the flattering impression of knowing the human heart as well as the author.' This is simply not true of Claudel at the peak of his theatrical achievement.¹ In *The Hostage*, he wrote with all the tricks of the theatre at his finger-tips. The play is full of intrigue. The curtain descends upon lines which brilliantly reveal and shift focus. The exits and entrances, that, for instance, of Pius VII at a concealed panel, are flawlessly timed. In his early period, Claudel was theatrically inept. In his late period, chiefly marked by *The Satin Slipper*, he snaps his fingers at the theatre. In his middle period, he is a master. In *Le Repos du Septième Jour*, which is not quite early and not quite middle period, he handled an almost unmanageable theme and, when he saw that from a purely theatrical point of view it had been bungled, he abandoned it. Even now it could be redeemed.

L'OTAGE (1910) EXISTS IN TWO ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS, one by Pierre Chavannes, published by Yale and Oxford University Presses in 1917, one by Edward Sackville-West, broadcast by the B.B.C. on Sunday, 20th February 1944, and not yet published. Nineteen-ten was also the year in which *L'Annonce faite à Marie* appeared in its final form and may therefore be regarded as the *annus mirabilis* of Claudel, the

¹ M. Weidlé comments, 'In Claudel dialogue and action are not, as in "normal" nineteenth- and twentieth-century dramaturgy, copies of the speech and behaviour of everyday life; they are *more revealing* and therefore less realistic, true to something which is not mere psychology'. This I accept up to a point, though I still cannot agree that Claudelian drama lacks action, movement, plot, agility or scenic strategy. Moreover, the degree to which the dialogue even of modern naturalistic drama differs from the characteristic dialogues of real life is a matter which tends to escape sedentary men of letters and indeed all who lack practical experience of the theatre. Anybody unwilling to see this or to understand its importance should try to pass off a page of Pinero, Maugham or even Galsworthy in conversation. The stylisation, though less conscious and directed to other ends, is no less pervasive and complete.

year in which he produced his two most perfect and perhaps indeed his only fully stage-worthy plays, though as reading-matter both must give place to *Le Soulier de Satin*, fourteen years later. *The Hostage* is the first of a trilogy of plays of which the sequels are *Le Pain dur* (1915) and *Le Père humilié* (1916). The three cover a half-century from 1813 to 1871 and are clearly intended to present the progressive decline of France and of Europe after the Revolution and the destruction of the old monarchy. In this sense, they are political plays. They align M. Claudel with Charles Maurras and René Béhaine, the Comte de Paris and the Catholic-Latin bloc, preparing for him, as if in ambush, General Franco and the aged Marshal Pétain. Neatly caught by Franco, Claudel apparently grew chary and avoided the later trap.

In 1809, Luigi Barnaba Chiaramonti, who had been Pope Pius VII for nine years, excommunicated Napoleon Bonaparte, whom he had previously consecrated Emperor of France with his own pontifical hands at Notre-Dame in Paris. The immediate cause of this bull of excommunication was Napoleon's annexation of the Papal States to France. Its immediate result was that General Radet took Chiaramonti prisoner. The Pope was held in captivity, first at Grenoble, then at Savona and finally at Fontainebleau. His continued defiance of the Emperor and the difficulties now confronting Napoleon on all sides restored Chiaramonti to the Papal See in 1814. The Jesuits were brought back, the Index and the Inquisition restored. In his declining years, Pius VII became the patron of exiled kings and, after the fall of the Empire, behaved graciously to Napoleon's family too. His bones rest in a tomb carved by Bertel Thorwaldsen, a Dane and a Protestant.

The fantasy that he personally might have rescued the Holy Father must have occurred to innumerable Catholic boys of chivalrous temper reading, between the ages of ten and sixteen, the history of this five years' captivity. Claudel was a boy in whose history books at the Lycée Louis le Grand the Popes cannot have loomed large. We may, therefore, presume that this boyish fantasy occurred to him in mature life. For it is

this fantasy which underlies *The Hostage* and whose echoes continue to sound through *Le Pain dur* and *Le Père humilié*, which deals with the final loss of the Papal States under Giovanni Maria Mastai-Ferretti (Pius IX) who was also taken prisoner and exiled from Rome for a while, not by the soldiers of Napoleon but by Italian nationalists, whose legitimate purposes he had attempted to frustrate by means of foreign intervention.

A play based upon a boy's self-righteous adventure-fantasy could scarcely fail to hold a stage set for audiences who frequent the theatre mainly for childish and adolescent reasons. *The Hostage's* theme is a gift to any playwright. Grant that in Claudel's case it is further heightened by family traditions of priest-hiding at this very period. Add to it all the colour of Claudel's language, and you have what *The Hostage* in fact is, a first-rate stage-play. It also made, in the sensitive hands of Mr. Sackville-West, a first-rate radio-play.

The curtain rises upon the library in a former Cistercian abbey, now the only remaining ancestral property of the Coûfontaines. The family arms, with the motto, 'Coûfontaine adsum !' and a crucifix made of the beams from one of the family's houses burnt during the Revolution are prominently displayed. It is night. We are in candlelight. A storm rages outside. Sygne de Coûfontaine is joined by her cousin George to whom she first wishes to hand over all the Coûfontaine property she has managed to preserve and buy back piecemeal, and whom towards the end of the first scene she pledges herself to marry. George has arrived at the house with an old priest riding on a donkey. This priest is revealed to be the Pope, whom George has spirited away from Napoleon's guards.

Sygne leaves the library. A servant opens the shutters. It is now dawn. A secret panel in the wainscoting opens. Out steps the Pope in a black cassock and white skull-cap, and we are in Scene Two of the first act. George is a secular royalist. He does not conspicuously believe in God. He urges the Pope to political action on behalf of the *ancien*

régime. The Pope wishes to return to Rome and to take Christianity underground a second time to the catacombs.

In the second act, we see Toussaint Turelure drinking coffee with Sygne de Coûfontaine in the same room. It is afternoon. The storm has abated. Toussaint is the son of Sygne's old servant and wet-nurse Suzanne and so milk-brother to Sygne herself. He has prospered under the Revolution and the Empire and is now Baron Turelure and Prefect of the Marne. He it was who, in the Revolution, had caused the elder Coûfontaines to be executed. As children, Sygne and George had witnessed the execution, and their faces had been spattered with their parents' blood. Naturally enough, they dislike Turelure on this account, but the venom which Claudel spits at him through Sygne is of quite another kind. The killing of the elder Coûfontaines is less emphasised than the fact that Toussaint, once a serf, is now the master, that he stands for the rights of man instead of the divine right of kings, and that he is a cripple. His presentation of Turelure displays indeed the only *technical* imperfection of Claudel's method in the play. Turelure is permitted to explain his own nature. He is conscious of his own deformities and his own despair. His love for Sygne exhibits not crude and belittling desire but precisely the kind of family-building sentiments of which the author so clearly approves when they occur in the well-born. It is as Pascal says, '*Tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner*', and a man as truthful and as explicit as Turelure is rarely altogether unattractive. Evil is in general bound up with stupidity and unconsciousness.

Turelure says :

' My body is broken, my soul is in darkness and towards you I turn my face stained with crime and despairing.'

And the reply he gets is :

' How dare you speak to me in this way ? '

And again :

' No, no, you wicked cripple, I am not for you ! '

The charges which Claudel might, in a novel, have preferred against a Turelure not possessed of the surface virtues which self-explanatory stage-presentation imposes on him would

have been that he was treacherous, callous, dull-witted, grasping and insensitive. He is indeed presented in this light later on, but not in the earlier part of his dialogue with Sygne, so that, having enlisted our sympathies at his first appearance, he does not in what follows disband them as rapidly as the author would no doubt have wished. In this first scene, he is a son of the Revolution treated with contumely by a priggish young woman and her equally priggish brother, who are snobs of the purest and rarest kind and whose chief quarrel with Turelure is the mere fact that he, a peasant, dares to be in love with Sygne de Coûfontaine.

A further curious inconsistency is introduced by George's story in the first act of the death of his wife and children. His wife had become the Dauphin's mistress. Turelure is exhibited as the representative villain who displaces names and breaks up the life of old families, but it was his royal masters, on whose behalf he lives a life of extreme peril as their underground Lord-Lieutenant for Champagne and Lorraine, who broke up the family of George de Coûfontaine.

However, Turelure, heavily repulsed in fair action, now plays his trump card. He knows that the Pope is at Coûfontaine, he knows that George brought him, and . . . he moves his hand towards the secret panel (he knows the house as well as Sygne, for he too was brought up here). Sygne opens the drawer of her desk, where she keeps a pistol loaded. It is a Hitchcock moment. Then the village priest, Father Badilon, comes in. Turelure goes. Scene Two consists of Sygne's struggle of conscience. It is plain that she can save the Pope and her brother by marrying Turelure and not otherwise. She yields stubbornly and slowly, Father Badilon urging her by suggestion but refraining from command or injunction. This scene is perfection. Except the ambiguous first presentation of Turelure, and the whole act is perfection. I do not know where in the whole literature of the theatre there is dialogue at once so heavy with poetry and so irresistible in its movement.

Observe, however, one thing. That George's children should have died was demanded not by the dramatic exigencies

of this second act but rather by a fetichism of 'name', which appears to have for Claudel the force attached to it in primitive tabus. That Sygne, a virgin, must yield her body to a man whom she finds both uncongenial and physically repulsive and that he killed her parents are dwarfed by the fact that, George's children being dead, the *name* of Coûfontaine will disappear when she becomes the wife of Baron Turelure. Note also that there had to be a *pledge* involved. Sygne had in the first act pledged herself to George. He had given her his glove. Sygne's sense of self-abasement is brought to its finest point by the fresh memory of this pledge and of its physical token. That is another kind of fetichism.

In the third act, intrigue reaches a fantastic pitch. Napoleon is hard pressed. Turelure is in command of Paris. Whoever holds Paris, holds France. Sygne has borne Turelure a son who is being baptised off-stage to the sound of cannon in the distance. Turelure is proposing to double-cross Napoleon and to hand over Paris to the man who is to become Louis XVIII at the age of sixty, obese and full of gout. Turelure gives Sygne a deed which the King's plenipotentiary must sign before the orders to the Paris garrison will be given. There is a touchy moment here, but melodrama rarely fails to come off in expert hands. Turelure introduces the King's plenipotentiary. It is . . . George. 'George!' cries Sygne. 'Madame,' says George with cold propriety and kisses her hand. Turelure goes out. He is heard making a speech off for the baptism of his son, in whom Sygne appears to take no interest. George and she debate the coming world in which even the King is but King now by consent of Turelure. Nothing remains. There are now not even rights, in the first act invidiously contrasted with *right*,¹ but only possession.

¹ Renan occurs again and again in Claudel's writing, much as Locke, Newton, Voltaire occur in Blake's, as an Aunt Sally at which random balls of anti-modernism can be endlessly hurled. In view of this minor obsession, it is interesting to note that the attack of George and Sygne de Coûfontaine on the post-revolutionary world might almost have been lifted word for word from Renan. M. Chavannes quotes this Renan passage in the introduction to his translation of *The Hostage*, without, apparently, perceiving any irony. 'Suppress this great law (that the human task is indivisible

The deed which George is to sign makes over the last item of Coûfontaine property to Turelure. Sygne makes him sign it. George speaks bitterly of the broken pledge. This is the moment of Turelure's triumph. Even the *name* of Coûfontaine will be granted him by the King if George dies without heir.

But George intends, as soon as Turelure has given his orders for the capitulation of Paris, to kill him. Thus will the King be free of the constitutional obligations to which Turelure is binding him. It will also free Sygne of the husband she loathes. Sygne protests without conviction. That is the end of Scene One. Turelure re-enters, sends out his messengers with the orders. George appears at the window. Sygne throws herself in front of her husband and receives George's ball. Turelure fires and kills George. The two Coûfontaines are laid side by side on a table. The King is announced. He enters. Turelure is made a count. The realistic play turns into a pageant. The King of England, the King of Prussia, the Emperor of Austria, the Emperor of Russia and the Papal Nuncio all enter. Through the window, revolutionary Paris is seen burning in the distance.

That at least is the first version for reading. The acting version is a scene shorter and so infinitely better that one can only suppose the original ending to have been a gesture of aesthetic defiance. The fourth scene of Act Three of the acting version is in fact of the same degree of perfection as the latter half of Act Two. It is, again, a scene with only two characters. They are Turelure and the dying Sygne, and Sygne does not speak, so that the whole scene is in effect a monologue. Again one must use superlatives. The only other case on record in which a monologue is made to carry

and demands for its accomplishment inequalities which are not an injustice), put all individuals on the same grade with equal rights, without the bond of submission to a common task, and you have mediocrity, isolation, barrenness, the impossibility of living, something like the life of our time, the saddest, even for the common people, that has been lived.' This was said by the man whom Claudel remembered with horror from his schooldays, when Renan came to present prizes and pressed upon the young foreheads ' *sa large face d'éléphant sans tronpe*'.

the whole action in this way is Strindberg's one-act play *The Stronger*, and it is trivial beside the conclusion of this play of Claudel's.

Turelure appears to taunt Sygne for having saved his life at the expense of her own, as though she had been compelled to love him in her last moments. He sees that it is not true. And now he taunts her with damnation because she dies with an unforgiving heart. Finally, he plays upon the pride of family which has made her obdurate. I quote the last few lines in the Chavannes translation and could wish the copyright laws would allow me the whole scene.

‘Coûfontaine ! Coûfontaine ! Do you hear me ?

‘What ! you refuse ! you betray !

‘Rise, though you are dead already ! it is your Suzerain who calls ! What, are you a deserter ?

‘Rise, Sygne ! Rise, soldier of God ! and give Him your glove,

‘Like Roland on the field of battle when he restored his glove to the archangel Saint Michael.

‘Rise and cry : *Adsum, Sygne ! Sygne !*

‘(He appears enormous and mocking as he stands over her.)

‘*Coûfontaine, adsum ! Coûfontaine, adsum !*

‘(She makes a violent effort, as if to rise, lifts her hand towards heaven and falls back again.)

‘(TURELURE in a lower tone as if afraid :)

‘*Coûfontaine, adsum !*

‘(Silence. He takes the torch and passes the light before her eyes, which remain motionless and fixed.)’

Purely as a technical point, which has no bearing on the general purpose of this essay, it is interesting to note how Mr. Sackville-West got over two difficulties involved in the presentation of this ending through a wholly ‘blind’ medium. Two lines had to be introduced. Sygne had to begin to say, ‘*Coûfontaine, adsum !*’ (or rather, for Mr. Sackville-West had wisely translated the motto, ‘I, Sygne de Coûfontaine, am here’). There was a marked pause with the music coming up for the conclusion, and Turelure had then to say, in a whisper, ‘*Syne ! Can you still hear me ? Can you see the candle I pass back and forth before your eyes ?*’

L'Otage was presented at the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre on 5th June 1914. André Gide's cry of astonishment, ' *Trop de génie ! trop de génie !*' was widely echoed. This overwhelming success drew from Claudel the following letter to *Le Temps* : ' If my play has been so favourably received, it is because the audience, most of them unfamiliar with my religious convictions, nevertheless felt that tragic force which comes from the intervention in our individual daily lives of an appeal outside and above us. The more or less wretched circumstances in the midst of which we all live nevertheless leave us with the feeling that there is something in us which is unused, and that perhaps it is precisely the best and deepest thing in us. It is this need, this great latent desire, to which both present-day morality and present-day art refuse satisfaction. Amid all our empty preoccupations, we have the sensation of nullity which goes with idleness, unless one embraces that cross which stretches us everywhere to the limit.' After this profoundly existential utterance, Claudel betook himself to a Dominican priory in Belgium to make a retreat.

NEITHER *LE PAIN DUR* NOR *LE PÈRE HUMILIÉ* IS so excellent a play as *The Hostage*. Except in its language, *Le Pain dur* is very little above the level of the better kind of plays which have infested Shaftesbury Avenue and St. Martin's Lane these twenty years. Mr. Redgrave could probably make a success of it even now. *Le Père humilié* is finer, but it is still not an adequate sequel to *The Hostage*.

In *Le Pain dur*, Toussaint Turelure is killed by his son, Louis. That is to say, he dies of fright while Louis is levelling at him two loaded pistols. Louis believed that he would die of fright, but almost certainly intended to pull the trigger had it been necessary. A Polish tom-boy, Lumir, Louis's former comrade-in-arms in Africa, and Turelure's Jewish mistress, Sichel, variously conspire at his death. The period is that of the constitutional monarchy of Louis-Philippe, the scene that of *The Hostage*, except that the crucifix has been taken down and propped against the wall to make

room for the portrait of the bourgeois King and that all the books have been removed from the shelves, presumably to indicate the general illiteracy of the nineteenth century.

The play carries a prefatory note in which Claudel says that the subject of *Le Pain dur* is '*la Rupture des barrières et la Rencontre des races*', so that there were bound to be Jews in it. He wishes to meet beforehand the charge of anti-Semitism which might arise from the fact that the two Jewish characters, Ali Habenichts and his daughter, Sichel, Turelure's mistress and subsequently Louis's wife, are as individuals antipathetic. He refers to Jews among his friends and to the Jews who have died for France in the war, and he adds, with an echo of Léon Bloy's symphonic *Salut par les Juifs*, as fine a battle-cry against the anti-Semitism of political imbeciles and crooks as may be found anywhere. '*Le fait Juif est trop grand et trop magnifique, le peuple est trop important au regard de Dieu, pour qu'il soit possible d'en traiter de cette manière épisodique.*' When I first read the play I was puzzled by this prefatory note. In a play in which all the characters are so repulsive, it seemed a little odd to separate the Jews from the Frenchmen and the Polish woman for special apology, since the Jewish question was by no means so touchy in 1915 as it was later to become, since political insight (as opposed to diplomatic acumen) has never been M. Claudel's strong point and since in any case Ali and Sichel are the two best-justified of the entire *dramatis personae*, Ali in particular being a harmless and on the whole a likeable old man, though it is true he may be thought to have sold his daughter into concubinage. The clue is given, I think, by a reference, in a letter, to a Jewish banker in Frankfurt-am-Main, whose intelligent appreciation of *The Tidings Brought to Mary* had given Claudel a particular pleasure. Personal matters have everywhere entered into Claudel's work as I have already indicated. The group of family legends is used again and again. Pierre Craon, builder of churches, was introduced into *La Jeune fille Violaine* and turned it into *L'Annonce faite à Marie* because of Claudel's admiration for his father-in-law, M. Sainte-Marie-Perrin, similarly a '*bâtisseur d'églises*'. In *Le Père humilié*,

one of Claudel's intimates of the moment in Rome, Prince Vladimir Ghika, godfather to one of his sons, becomes Prince Wronsky, the gracious host of the masked ball with which the play opens. It is the Jewish banker in Frankfurt-am-Main, at that time lost behind the enemy lines, whose feelings Claudel wishes to spare. And it is not from the light impact of *Le Pain dur* that Claudel wishes to spare them, but from *Le Père humilié*, which is to follow, for in *Le Père humilié* the Jewish taint in Pensée de Coûfontaine, daughter of Louis and Sichel, is to be presented as a catastrophe and a visiting of the sins of the fathers upon the children at the same level as hereditary blindness. In a number of respects, *Le Pain dur* appears to have been written purely in order to bridge the gap between *The Hostage* and *Le Père humilié*, that is to say, the period between the two prisoner-popes, Pius VII and Pius IX. This would account for its general inferiority. It is a stop-gap, an exercise. Claudel had no particular feeling for the period. Louis-Philippe was a mere smudge of drabness to him. He introduces the text-book matters of importance of the period, the Polish émigrés, the African colonies, the railroad speculations, adds a little psychological drama and a little political bile and leaves it at that. And he makes Toussaint Turelure die of fright, which is unforgivable, for, whatever else he may have been, Turelure was a man of extraordinarily steady nerve and no coward. That a peasant's greed should dominate him in his later years was likely enough, but that one of Napoleon's generals should become transformed into this snivelling miser is a little outside the bounds of credibility.

And so we come to the concluding play of the trilogy. In *Le Père humilié*, the *name* has in fact been restored. Louis is M. le Comte de Coûfontaine, French ambassador in Rome. Pensée, his daughter and Sygne's granddaughter, is blind. Dressed as Autumn, she and her mother, dressed as Night, are talking in Wronsky's gardens, having eluded the other guests at a *fête travestie* on the Feast of St. Pius (Pius V), 5th May 1869. Pensée confesses to her mother that she is in love with Orian de Homodarmes, one of two brothers who are nephews of Pius IX and officers in the papal armies,

although she has met him but once for an instant and that with the disadvantage of blindness.

The presentation of Pensée's blindness in word and in gesture occupies the greater part of the first act, and it is wonderfully done, its revelation to Orian fantastically delayed until the line upon which the curtain falls. Blindness has more than once travailed Claudel. The blindness of Violaine plays a considerable part in *The Tidings Brought to Mary*. In *Le Repos du Septième Jour*, blindness is the final horror of the dead, and in the effort to realise it Act Two is played in total obscurity. The Emperor himself returns to earth blind. It is a subject which has also entered largely into the work of Yeats and Maeterlinck, the only two names in symbolist drama which can at any time be usefully conjoined with Claudel's.

The political background is enunciated by Pensée's father. Claudel puts into his unsympathetic and hypocritical mouth the view of the opponents of Pius IX. 'Why this intransigence which does not belong to our time? these measureless claims which sadden all the sincere friends of the Papacy, and, if I may say so, all true Christians? What does all this defiance mean? this infallibility they are about to have granted them?' Pensée carries the debate further and into a more sympathetic key in her conversation with Orian de Homodarmes. She tells him that he has espoused the cause of the dead against the living and explains how moving she finds the youthful, nationalist aspirations of the Italians.

Since Act Two takes us straight into the presence of the Holy Father himself, a little historical background seems to be indicated at this point, for the struggles of the Papacy are normally unfamiliar to English readers. Pope Pius IX was the last of the great political popes. His pontificate from 1846 to 1878 was characterised by extreme violence and suggests a powerful but not particularly attractive figure. The man himself was of a handsome presence. Apart from papal infallibility, decreed during the period covered by the action of Claudel's play, his chief achievement in the doctrinal field was Immaculate Conception, a dogma systematically confused

in English minds with Virgin Birth, but which in fact teaches that the B.V.M. was conceived without taint of original sin. He also restored the hierarchy in Great Britain.

Rejected for military service on the grounds of epilepsy, Pius IX opened his pontificate with a number of liberal measures which included a general political amnesty and mitigation of the censorship, but subsequently set his face against all limitations of his own temporal power. In 1848, he refused to countenance the Italian war of liberation against Austria. There were assassinations. The Swiss guard had to be disbanded. The Pope fled to Naples with French and Bavarian aid. A republic was proclaimed in Rome. The Pope appealed for intervention against the Italians and was restored to Rome by foreign arms. He now instituted such a reign of clerical terror that even the occupying Austrians protested. Representations against papal misrule were made by almost every government in Europe. The temporal power was progressively eaten into. The defeat of the French by the Prussians in 1870 gave the final signal to the Italians. The French withdrew from Rome. King Victor Emmanuel marched in and flew the Italian flag on the Capitol. At a plebiscite, the incorporation of the Papal States into the Kingdom of Italy was voted by a majority of more than a hundred to one.

The most characteristic utterance of Pope Pius IX was perhaps the final clause in his *Syllabus*, which declares that 'the pontiff neither can nor ought to be reconciled with progress, liberalism and modern civilisation'. Little wonder that a later pope¹ was compelled to state: 'The great scandal of the nineteenth century is that the Church lost the working class'. The doctrine of papal infallibility could scarcely have been promulgated by a more humanly fallible person.

¹ Pius XI. It is interesting to note how two contemporaries of similar background choose themselves favourite popes who were totally opposed in their views. This pronouncement of the late pope is the very keystone of Maritain's political philosophy. No Catholic could openly flout a papal pronouncement, but there is contumely in the mere fact that Claudel ignores his contemporary head in favour of two figures from the history-books, one of them even in his own time a conspicuous 'reactionary',

If this historical background is borne in mind, we shall turn with something like astonishment to Act Two of *Le Père humilité*. This humble, quiet old man confessing his foibles to a young Franciscan and listening with endless patience and compassion to his nephews' stories of their conflicting love for a blind Jewess, is not easily to be recognised in the ambitious and irascible Pius IX, who was at his most declamatory in 1869.

Orian de Homodarmes, the nephew loved by Pensée de Coûfontaine, wishes to yield her to Orso, his brother, who first loved her. He wishes to enlist the Holy Father's avuncular counsel on behalf of his argument, and when Orso presently goes to bring Pensée herself to witness, Orian refuses to see her. It is the curiously wilful and capricious self-denial in love which forms the mainspring, and a very powerful mainspring, of the action in *The Satin Slipper*, eight years later. Here, however, the pledge is but half kept. In Act Three, in a scene of great beauty, Pensée and Orian are reunited with Orso's blessing. Act Four would bring tears to many eyes in any theatre, but it is a dreadful piece of bathos from a more severely aesthetic point of view. We are totally unprepared for the fact that the pious young Orian had, before proceeding into battle on behalf of his spiritual father's temporal estate, not married Pensée but inconsiderately put her in the family way, a proceeding to which Claudel's heroes are in general but little disposed. Orso returns to the expectant mother with the news of Orian's death and an offer of his own to make an honest woman of her without conjugal obligation on her part. This very decent proposition is preceded by an embarrassing pantomime in which Orso pretends to be Orian and in which Pensée de Coûfontaine is or pretends to be deceived for a while.

THOSE WHO BLUSH EASILY WOULD DO WELL to avoid the one-act fantasy called *La Nuit de Noël de 1914*, published at the Art Catholique in 1915, as shocking a piece of *bondiuserie* as ever came out of the Place St. Sulpice. At

midnight on Christmas Eve, the souls of the recently dead appear in the neighbourhood of Rheims in white gowns and in the guise of small children. The *poilus*, for instance, have lost their moustaches and beards. Twelve is tolled not by a bell but by the sacrilegious Germans firing twelve rounds gunfire into Rheims Cathedral. The reborn children tell their stories of rape, mutilation and wanton slaughter and gaze down a well which shows them France, no longer the France of Hugo, Renan and Voltaire but a France returned with one accord to Christ upon the impact of the Lutheran hordes, deluded by Goethe, Kant, Nietzsche and other infamous authors. It can only be assumed that the victory of the Marne, the struggle before Verdun and the general hysteria of the times momentarily robbed Claudel of his senses, for even the cadets of the Alcazar failed to reduce him to this plight a second time. The piece is inconspicuous and not widely listed. Forgiveness and oblivion seem to be the only course.

The war-theme appears again in *L'Ours et la Lune*, completed in 1917 and therefore the immediate precursor of *The Satin Slipper*, upon which five years were to be spent. *L'Ours et la Lune*, published in one volume with *Protée* as 'two lyric farces', was composed in Rio de Janeiro, where the composer, Darius Milhaud, who also did a score for *Protée*, acted as Claudel's official secretary. A ballet, *L'Homme et son désir*, was devised at the same time. The Sunday-school heroics of *La Nuit de Noël de 1914* become even more incomprehensible when we realise that it was during the blackest days of the First World War that Claudel came closest to the slick, cosmopolitan modernity of Diaghilev, Cocteau and 'the Six'. *Protée* is mannered and amusing. *L'Ours et la Lune* is not amusing. It contains good things, but it is full of the kind of sentimental clowning whose peak achievement was reached nine years earlier with J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*. Since *Protée* deals with a dead myth—that is to say, with a myth which is no longer a myth—it does not concern us here. It belongs to the days of *Apollo Musagetes* and *The Gods go a-Begging*. It may be regarded as an elaboration of Gerard

Manley Hopkins's tart comment to the occasionally fatuous Robert Bridges. ' Believe me, the Greek gods are a totally unworkable material. . . . Looking only at their respectable side, they are poor ignoble conceptions ennobled bodily only (as if they had bodies) by the artists, but once in motion and action worthless—not gentlemen or ladies, cowards, loungers, without majesty, without awe, antiquity, foresight, character ; old bucks, young bucks and Biddy Buckskins. What did Athene do after leaving Ulysses ? Lounged back to Olympus to afternoon nectar. Nothing can be made of it. . . . The background of distance and darkness and doom which a tragedy should always have is shut out by an Olympian drop-scene ; the characters from men become puppets, their bloodshed becomes a leakage of bran.'

WE HAVE ALREADY OBSERVED THAT WHAT would pass for neurosis in the writing of an agnostic, psychological novelist is, in Mauriac, known as sin. This is also true of Graham Greene. In Claudel, on the contrary, that which you or I would consider neurotic in our friends is proclaimed virtue. Especially is this true of sexual hesitation and the angel with the flaming sword. Claudel is traditionally Catholic. Mauriac and Greene, for all their protestations, know their Freud as well as the best of us. The trend of Mauriac and Greene is to relate contemporary discoveries to traditional concepts. Claudel does not admit that there are any contemporary discoveries. He denies them all.

Inhibition has been that which coiled the mainspring of action throughout the history of Christian Europe. That psycho-analysis, the releaser of coiled springs, tends to dismantle the Christian machinery and restore us to the somnolent, timeless condition of the eastern world is a belief forced upon anybody who reads Graham Howe, with his oriental symbolism and his philosophy of ' acceptance ', or finds that upon his shelves are books, the detritus of twenty years, with titles such as *Yoga and Western Psychology* by a Dr. Coster who proves that they are identical, or properly considers the

evolution of the Huxley-Heard, Auden-Isherwood group or dwells upon Schopenhauer's parallel denunciation of the will and revival of the doctrines of reincarnation. Christianity cut across all previous traditions by stating firmly that men are responsible for themselves, that there is but one life-time on earth, that a man has at best seventy years in which to decide his fate for eternity. The sense of urgency thereby induced quickened the whole tempo of life. The oriental dwelt indulgently upon his *karma*, knowing that there was plenty of time to set everything to rights, if not in this life-time, yet in the next or the one after that. The Christian knew that if he died within the next hour he would be immediately called upon to make a final account of himself. He might courageously elect to be damned, and it is possible that all the best Christians do, but it could not be a matter of indifference to him. 'In the midst of life we are in death', is a perception common to east and west alike, but the meaning attached to death is not the same.

In our time, a group of Protestant theologians, impelled by the residual momentum of Kierkegaard, has evolved explicitly a 'theology of crisis', but Christian theology is from the beginning a theology of crisis. The critical apprehension of things is that which has distinguished Christendom from the rest of the world. Need it be said that this faculty evolved by two thousand years of Christianity operates equally well in the old rake making a death-bed repentance and in the puritanical agnostic? The Christian scientist, theosophist and pacifist anarchist are apostates and renegades, but not the ascetic revolutionary, Hitler or Lenin.

Inhibition practised openly for the purpose of increasing tension has been the sign of Catholic asceticism at its best, as inhibition practised from obscure motives of hatred has been the sign of Protestant asceticism at its worst. The malignant taciturnity observed in the witchcraft trials is observable throughout Lutheran and Calvinist territory. It is also very marked in the Jansenist pocket represented by M. François Mauriac, in many respects a Protestant at heart. The self-torture practised by the heroes and heroines of

Claudel is, on the contrary, the gay and contemptuous discipline of athletes or the jealous fastidiousness of a brave and deliberate rake. Don Juan is unthinkable in a Protestant country. So are the characters of Claudel's plays and more especially *The Satin Slipper*.

The evaluation of this work is probably the most difficult critical set task of the century. Let us be temperate and admit it only to be one of the dozen masterpieces of fifty years. At the same time, let us not disguise our suspicion that it may rank even higher than that. Without attempting any comparison of statures between Claudel and Dante, let us also boldly assert that it is the most comprehensively and exclusively Catholic work since *The Divine Comedy*. And then let us pause for breath and proceed more cautiously.

Asked to produce a list of the unquestionable literary masterpieces of the first half of the twentieth century, an Englishman would no doubt put down *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land* and then scratch his head. After a while, he might diffidently add *Sons and Lovers*. He would wonder about Yeats. Surely, Yeats was a larger poet than Eliot, and yet what single work . . .? Would it be cheating to count *The Tower* and *The Winding Stair* as one book and put that down? Proust, of course, belonged to the twentieth century. But is a life-long pilgrimage a literary masterpiece? Rilke? *The Duinese Elegies*? That Spaniard the left-wing poets used to invoke. Lorca. Alas, if one does not know the language, one has to take Lorca on trust. That is also true for Pasternak. And what about the other Frenchmen? Valéry, for instance. Gide. But what have they written? A Frenchman would begin at this end and find himself immediately confronted by the same question, especially in the case of Gide. We admire Valéry and Gide, but is it for any particular thing they have done? What single work of Gide's, for instance, stands firmly upon its own base? It is really for what they have not done that we prize Valéry and *a fortiori* Gide. It is for an attitude, a gesture and a pose. It is a kind of negative sincerity by which their names hold us spell-bound. As to *Ulysses*, did it begin or end? Did it not rather decompose?

As to *Sons and Lovers*, is it really so good as we thought it at the time? Had not both of them, in their minority, high-brow way, a temporary, journalistic, political importance? Was Lawrence not primarily a moralist, and were not *Ulysses*, yes, and *The Waste Land*, methodological treatises, like *The Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Cartesian Discours*? It is all terribly difficult. Perhaps we had better not press the point. Perhaps we had better enjoy what we have and leave to posterity the dreary and invidious task of giving a mark to each of those who in the first half of the twentieth century clearly participated in the divine labour of creation. The humble, necessary duties allotted to a critic of his own time had best be confined to mere annotation. I continue, then, to tease my theme in the same manner as before, but rather more briefly because the text in English is readily accessible and itself carries a summary of the plot.

The Satin Slipper was written during the five years from 1919 to 1924. It has been available to English readers since 1931 in a translation, attractive and full of an only occasionally misguided gusto, by Chesterton's Father Brown, Monsignor John O'Connor. It is four times the length of a play and for that reason divided up into four 'days'. With the aid of a revolving stage, a cyclorama and a screen, it could be done in two days at a theatre, beginning in the afternoon and with a suitable break for the evening meal. For radio, it would require a great deal of adaptation because its effects are predominantly visual. A greatly abridged version was in fact presented on the stage in Paris during the German occupation. It was considered to be a great success, though the whole thing is so well integrated that every cut was bound to lose something. The length of the play is due not to any sort of padding or *longueurs* but to Quixotry, exuberance, playfulness in the choice of methods and the intention of presenting a whole world.

The time is the middle of the fifteenth century, the scene the whole world. The hero, Don Rodrigo, administers Central America, sends off expeditions to Patagonia and the Arctic, loses his love in Africa and his leg in Japan. A globe

turns on the screen. The constellation Orion speaks. There is a scene in Prague after the Battle of the White Mountain. The Armada is dispatched against England. This God's-eye view of Claudel's has been noticed before and is with him since childhood. More impressive, however, than the topographical universality of *The Satin Slipper* is its metaphysical implication of the universe. The central plot is concerned with romantic, ill-starred love. Its trivia compromise the whole scheme of redemption. We have again Bloy's 'reversible' universe, but it is no longer necessary for theatres to burn and conquerors to be born in order that the divine symbolism shall be exhibited. It is sufficient if a girl married to an old man and in love with a young one stands upon a mule and places her slipper in the hands of a statue of the Virgin, 'so that, when I would rush headlong into evil, it may be with limping foot'.

It is the King who on the second day is persuaded to divide the lovers, ordering Rodrigo to America and Prouheze to Mogador. The action is protracted by the invariable fetiches. Because of her *ex voto*, Prouheze will not see Rodrigo when he sails to Mogador to fetch her. As soon as her aged husband dies, she writes 'the letter to Rodrigo' which travels about the world for ten years, is mentioned by everybody and, like a Chinese idol, causes the death of each man who passes it on. In the end it reaches Rodrigo through a scene-shifter. In the meantime, Prouheze has married Camillo, the apostate, in order to limit his power for evil, and borne to him in the flesh a daughter informed by the soul of Rodrigo, the souls of the lovers having communicated nightly. Rodrigo sails to Prouheze again, only to see her placed upon a funeral barge, himself unable to pronounce the word enjoining her to live. He fights in Japan, loses favour with the King, becomes a vendor of holy images, is recalled to be mocked with the governorship of England and eventually given away with a boatload of old iron. There are countless minor intrigues, endless brief scenes in which the saints, Prouheze's guardian angel, pedants, conquistadors, fishermen and stuffed images figure. The touch is light, the language of an assurance

given to no poetical dramatist since Shakespeare in England, Racine in France, a variety not given to Racine and a moral intensity given only to Corneille, whose *Cid Campeador* also bore the name Rodrigo and of whom Cervantes said, as he might have said of Claudel's hero, 'There is no doubt there was such a man as the Cid but much doubt whether he achieved what is attributed to him'. The Cid of history was by no means the perfect knight of romance. He fought as often with the Moors against the Spaniards as contrariwise, and Claudel may have taken a hint from him for the tormented, enigmatical figure of the apostate, Camillo.

The whole of the sixteenth century lives in pantomime before our eyes. The whole? No, among its great driving forces, there is one missing. It is the one theme which Claudel always shied at or represented as a nameless horror. His failure to grapple it has diminished his contemporary importance and permitted him to wander into strange by-ways of historical perversity and the political absurd. Oddly enough, the one poet who could have stopped the gap for him has also damned himself politically. I mean Ezra Pound. And the power is the power of usury. It is probable that Claudel seized upon the sixteenth century precisely because it seemed to him the last period during which gold was concrete and its power limited, the last epoch to which the dialectic of Karl Marx did not apply. There are indications that we are now upon the threshold of another such epoch. It may be that the money-age is very nearly over. Gold itself is bankrupt. But it is still unpardonable to ignore money while possessing and employing it, and the attempts at Christian crusading that we have seen in our time have always enlisted the services of the shadiest financiers, who happen not to have belonged to that race to which the church first abandoned usury, believing it impermissible to a Christian.

Chapter Seven

PROSE FICTION AND POETIC DRAMA

I PREFER TO LEAD THIS BRIEF AND UNIM-
portant book to its close not with a summary of conclusions
(of which in fact it contains none) but by starting further ares.
The ares I have in mind are the relations between poetry
and fiction, drama and fiction, poetry and drama. For very
little of what has been said about Claudel would betray to a
reader who did not already know it that he was a poet, and
the general line of discussion has been drawn from Bloy, by
way of Bernanos and Mauriac, to Claudel, without any very
clear reminder that at a certain point we had left one medium
for another, not simply narrative fiction for drama but prose
narrative fiction for poetic drama.

Between ten and fifteen years ago, there was in this country
a very serious effort made by men like T. S. Eliot and Herbert
Read on the one hand and I. A. Richards, F. R. Leavis and
William Empson on the other (these last moved by the
impact of Logical Positivism on Cambridge) to fix and define
the nature of poetry. This was also the period during which
Mr. Eliot turned to the theatre. Since then, as the general
quality of English verse deteriorated, the question has not
been raised. It was the period of the attack on 'self-
expression' and specifically on the aesthetics of Croce. A
new classicism was sought, and this was in itself a measure
of the vigour of the moment, for when restraint is demanded
it at least indicates the presence of something to be restrained.
The present demand is for a romantic poetry. Intense
feeling is sought. This suggests—as the demands of D. H.
Lawrence suggested—a general organic debility and the
flogging of dead horses. It is a welcome sign of the condition
in France to-day that M. Thierry-Maulnier has recently
raised the cry for a new classicism. The key-phrase of 1930
was Mr. Eliot's 'objective correlate'. A poem, said Mr.

Eliot, was the poet's deliberate building-up from whatever materials lay to hand of the situation outside himself which corresponded with his state of thought and feeling. Dr. Richards laid down that in a poem you must not say, 'I am happy', you must behave as if you were, though I should have thought this was self-expression too.

In other words, it began to be understood that there was a curious insufficiency about lyrical poetry as it was currently understood and an attempt to give it a more external, more active rôle. That this change was a change in the direction of the theatre becomes clearer if we consider what Ezra Pound was doing at the time. He was establishing the form of the '*persona*', the dramatic mask in a play for one actor. He was, in effect, theorising about the dramatic monologue which Browning had developed before him.

But there is a dramatic element in all poetry. The poet steps forward to speak, and he cannot but speak in character. Mr. Eliot had appeared as an 'aged eagle' and as a common man filled with misgiving. The young poets of the Auden-Spender-Day Lewis fraternity were just coming forward together and giving excellent imitations of a band of clean-limbed young Germans wandering about the mountains looking for the dawn. Laforgue the dandy, Baudelaire the Satanic conjuror, Rimbaud the cursed boy, Yeats the man who dreamed of faeryland, Villon the tramp about to be hanged, were all well-known figures on the poetic halls. The poets in the main tradition of lyrical verse are more enigmatical, more difficult to characterise, but none of them spoke without his cue, Keats the unhappy lover, Keats the ecstatic nympholept, Milton the blind man, Milton the clarion voice. All verses are occasional. When they are not, they are obscure. That which is, in the magnificent popular idiom, 'uncalled-for', the gratuitous, is either dull or irritating, like the singing bore.

There are two great levels of taste. At one, verse is obscurely considered to be superior to prose. At the other, verse, unless its intention be pornographic, is openly treated as a matter for ridicule. The reason is in both cases the same,

It is that the dramatic intention of verse is rarely made clear. The genteel 'higher' level of taste dislikes the dramatically obvious or melodramatic. The pragmatical 'lower' level demands it. Anybody witnessing the agony of a gathering of English poets shamefacedly muttering their verses to each other, as though discovered in a wet bed, will have perceived that the 'higher' level itself knows in its heart how precarious that height is. Popular taste may frequently be wrong, but it is never meaningless.

Direct lyrical utterance is only tolerable and indeed only possible within a group whose preconceptions are identical. It communicates little beyond the sense of community. It is an arabesque, a variation upon this sense. Prose narrative is more searching because it is more informative and more narrowly expressive. In lyrical utterance, the 'objective correlate' can only be indicated. Its elements must be familiar. In prose fiction, it can be sought out by devious ways and fixed with every known pin and knot. Its elements may be highly personal, particularised and indeed eccentric. A lyric about autumn and death operates only for an audience which uniformly associates autumn with the fear of death. A novel may present a character whose fear of death is aggravated by the decay of vegetation and make his behaviour and feelings comprehensible to an audience which is unafraid of death and whose lives are spent among evergreens, in the barren tundra or upon the unseasonable equator.

Prose fiction may therefore be regarded as more 'creative' than lyrical poetry, whose functions are in the main either decorative or ritualistic. Prose fiction is able to create the possibility of new situations among existing human beings, whereas lyrical poetry can at best emphasise favourite situations among those already established. Prose fiction is also more 'vital' in the sense of more exactly rendering the sensation of life. This it does in virtue of its mere bulk and of the 'tedium' into which its great peril is that it may at any moment dissolve. It exists in time, whereas lyric poetry, despite its little by-play with the metronome, is static. The novel came into its own with Bergson and the new and pro-

found understanding of time. A full aesthetic of the novel could only be written by one who had mastered his Bergson and possibly his Heidegger too. The nature of time is the constant preoccupation of James, Proust, Joyce, Woolf and of any single-minded novelist to-day. The sense of time is conspicuously lacking from Christian thought. There is no preoccupation with time in Mauriac or Bernanos. In the work of Léon Bloy, time is viewed with particular hostility.

Drama stands betwixt and between. It has the particularisation, the locality, of narrative fiction, but its action takes place in an eternal present. The passage of time in a theatre is always brought about by trickery and characteristically by the trick of stopping the play and sending the audience out for a drink. In general, drama is closer to lyric than to narration. 'Drama', said Cardinal Newman, 'is poetry in persons.' It is lyrical utterance particularised and divided. It is poetry aspiring to the vital, creative rôle of prose fiction. In poetic drama, there is for this reason a certain redundancy. The obvious difference between drama and poetic drama is that the one is written in prose, the other in verse. Except when the tradition of acting is one which stresses metre, however, and except that poetic dramatists are prone to long speeches and involved imagery, the difference between prose and verse is not so perceptible in the theatre as it is on the printed page. Poetic drama between Racine and Claudel or between Shakespeare and Yeats was simply bad drama. It was pretentious, cumbrous and dull. The reason why Claudel, Yeats and Maeterlinck were more successful than Dryden, Shelley, Beddoes or Swinburne was not that they were better poets. It was that they had a clearer perception of the extent of the territory between lyrical verse and prose drama. They saw first that the poetry must lie in the action itself, that this must have the trickiness, the stylisation of verse. They also saw that in order to attune an audience to the relatively static values of the language, they must in some way suspend the action too. That is the meaning of the 'vagueness' of symbolist drama, its distance, its indistinct, withheld presentations.

In symbolist drama, the characters are frequently unnamed. Where they come from is unrevealed. Their motives are inexplicit. They are generalised figures, and their behaviour is trance-like. The static has become ecstatic. Maeterlinck, almost an exact contemporary of Claudel and of Yeats (he was born in 1862, Yeats three years later and Claudel three years later again) first stabilised the method in *La Princesse Maleine*, his first play, published in the same year as Claudel's turgid and unmanageable *Tête d'Or*. So confident was Maeterlinck of having at last evolved a formula for poetic drama that, having written *La Princesse Maleine* in verse, he at once saw that this was superfluous and subsequently rewrote it in prose. Claudel's general-purpose 'verset' is in itself neither prose nor verse. At times, it is obviously prose set out in very short paragraphs. At other times, it is just as obviously verse treated typographically like prose. Claudel himself has theorised about the matter in terms of inhalation and exhalation in his *Art Poétique*, and it is true that he uses his typographical eccentricities with great subtlety as a form of notation. However, the detail of verse technique is remote from the purposes of this book, and Claudel's adoption of the verset is from this point of view important only insofar as it shows how conscious he was from the outset of occupying a position midway between the characteristic forms of verse and of prose.

Of the plays by Claudel which I have so far left unconsidered, *The Tidings Brought to Mary* is a construction upon the Maeterlinck formula. It was written in three versions, of which the first two bore the title (and its similarity to Maeterlinck's cannot be missed) *La jeune fille Violaine*. In its final form it was completed in 1910, the year of *The Hostage*, in which Claudel took a decisive step in the direction of drama proper, the drama of individuals against a concrete background. *The Hostage*, for Claudel, represents a synthesis, however, for, before *The Tidings Brought to Mary*, he had written in 1906 his best piece in the more strictly naturalistic, contemporary tradition, *Partage de Midi*. After *The Tidings Brought to Mary*, Claudel walked a tight-rope stretched between drama and

poetic drama and did it, in *The Satin Slipper*, with unparalleled virtuosity.

Symbolist plays are inevitably situated in the Middle Ages, in much the same way as *surréaliste* fantasies are inevitably situated upon the sea-shore. *The Tidings Brought to Mary* is no exception, but Claudel already displays the self-consciousness which makes him call it '*un Moyen Age de convention, tel que les poètes du Moyen Age pouvaient se figurer l'antiquité*'. A chaste girl (Violaine) quixotically kisses a man who has grossly desired her (Pierre de Craon) when she discovers that he is a leper. She herself contracts leprosy, but this is not revealed until her father has gone away on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and until her sister (Mara) has convinced Violaine's fiancé (Jacques Hury) that Violaine is unchaste. Violaine retires to the forest of Géyn, where she lives the life of a pariah and becomes blind. Jacques Hury marries Mara, and Mara bears a child. The child dies, and on Christmas Eve Mara brings the dead child to Violaine in her forest hovel. Violaine holds it beneath her garment and gives it rebirth to the accompaniment of the songs of the angels. Subsequently, the still-jealous Mara causes Violaine to fall beneath a cart which crushes her. She is brought home to be buried. Her father returns from Palestine. He, Jacques Hury and Pierre de Craon (whose leprosy is now cured) talk together in the garden in the evening (this is '*that other cantata for three voices*' of which Weidlé speaks). Whether or not we agree that the theme itself is absurd, we shall find that there are astonishing exhibitions of naïveté in detail, for instance in the stage directions, which indicate at what points a child in arms shall gurgle and kick and what gyrations shall be described by a flock of pigeons released upon the stage. Sheer magnificence of language and sheer intensity of feeling bring it off.

I need not write at length about *The Tidings Brought to Mary*, for (in French) it is at the moment the most generally accessible of all Claudel's work, having been brought out in a school edition by the Cambridge University Press during the war. But I should like to draw attention to one point which bears on the considerations in other chapters. The blind and

leprosous Violaine says to her sister Mara, '*Le mâle est prêtre, mais il n'est pas défendu à la femme d'être victime*'. It is certain that in some sense the popes of *The Hostage* and *Le Père humilié* are cast in the rôle of scapegoats for all Christendom, but in this one line in which Claudel explicitly mentions the priest in connection with vicarious suffering it is to oppose him to 'the victim' as male to female. The priest, then, has a directing, active and even fecundating part. In the first scene of *The Satin Slipper*, it is a dying Jesuit who *wills* the whole action. Even in *The Hostage*, over against the scapegoat pope, we have the wine-bibbing local priest who impels Sygne to her course of sacrifice. The scene in which he slowly bends her will possibly takes its force from this fact that he is essentially male and that we perceive in him a representative of the sun in whose light women, who know not God, may contemplate and adore husband or sire, as it is explicitly stated in *L'Echange*. Even in the daily lives of the dingiest priests a kind of symbolic prowess has its place. I remember some years ago a protracted discussion in Catholic circles on the respective speeds with which certain priests could say mass and that the record to date was a little under ten minutes.

THE POETIC DRAMA ATTEMPTED IN THIS country since Claudel (and since Yeats) is on the whole discouraging and more particularly to its authors, who seem to try for a while and then give it up. The new element introduced by Mr. T. S. Eliot was liturgical repetition of a kind only possible in England or at any rate in a country whose ecclesiastical liturgy is in the mother-tongue, archaic and of unusual splendour. In *Sweeney Agonistes*, Mr. Eliot appeared to have evolved a form of dialogue combining strict metrical patterns with the stuttering, non-liturgical repetition of Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein and Damon Runyan. Why he gave up the experiment, he has not told us. There it still is—two 'fragments of an Aristophanic melodrama'—a manual for young poets intent upon the limelight, a promising seam opened and still unexploited.

The new element introduced by Messrs. Auden and Isherwood was the juxtaposition of solemn prose and jingling verse, the Elizabethan method turned upside down, and of themes drawn from psychiatric case-books. The left-wing plays which followed also had their litanies, chanted lists of heroes of the day-to-day struggle who had been shot in Vienna, imprisoned in Berlin or tortured in Rome. A recent disconcerting experience was to visit the Mercury, where *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Ascent of F 6* both first appeared to an astonished London, and to hear, in a right-wing play with a Christian subject but an agnostic flavour, a chanted list of political martyrs not now done to death in Berlin, Rome or Vienna, but in Moscow. I confess to an antipathy for little theatres. *Murder in the Cathedral* was able to hold a stage of any size. All that has been done since, though, in itself, like Anne Ridler's *Shadow Factory*, it may have great sincerity and charm, appears destined to die an old maid's death in Bayswater.

Why? Because its motives are obscure. Because it bears no confident relationship to public mythologies, neither one of flattery nor one of defiance. It frequently adopts the tones of voice of defiance, but what it defies is a private image.¹ It is not that the public dislikes poetic drama. I do not think the public cares two pins whether its drama be in verse, prose or pantomime. What it cares and rightly cares is that the pill shall be active and coated with real sugar. The public may be imbecile, but it is not a malignant imbecile. It will continue to prefer the recognisable formulae of Shaftesbury

¹ Of three plays presented consecutively at the Mercury, all were chiefly concerned to prove that living in the country is pleasanter than living in town (as it unquestionably is for persons of private means and timid imagination) and that machines are a bad thing. To judge by the road outside the theatre, the audiences who acclaimed these sentiments were composed entirely of car-owners and of those who in the petrol shortage would rather shout for a taxi than walk. I saw no horses. The hatefulness of machines is itself one of the most dangerous myths in this highly mechanized civilization. The opposition to the machine is most acute in those who are most dependent upon machines and serves apparently to diminish at once their feelings of guilt and their sense of responsibility.

Avenue and St. Martin's Lane until it is roused by something quite new. Its function is not to crowd round and encourage the experimental poet in his workshop. Like the poet, it has its own humble tasks to perform in the day-time. The theatre is a place for achievement. In the absence of great achievement, it has to be kept warm by some form of minor entertainment, carefully and suavely administered. That is how matters stand.

The action of the novel is more intimate and sly. In prose fiction, taste and attitude may be craftily undermined while the public sits by its fireside or lies in bed. In theory, radio could do this even more effectively. But the manipulation of etheric waves is expensive. It necessarily becomes a monopoly, either a corporate monopoly as in this country or a commercial monopoly as in America. Private in its operation but public at its source, radio is self-censoring and, except when a *coup d'état* is proposed, acts on the public behalf, so that radio policy is no more than the people's battle with its own conscience. For, notwithstanding all the more or less provisional distinctions of age, sex, colour, belief, income and taste, the human race is one and indivisible, a fact gratifying to some and the cause of rooted indignation in others.

As it seems to me, the contemporary theatre is in a poor way not because of any lack of talent but through a fundamental discouragement of will. I am aware that theatres pay at the moment, that they have never been so crowded, that the worst plays and the worst actors are greeted with acclamation, but this is not yet the kind of situation in which an art flourishes. It seems possible that the times are unpropitious to good theatre, and it is certain that the best dramatic talent is drained off into the cinema where it meets with endless frustration. Poetic drama in particular appears to have reached a dead-end. I do not expect to see another *Murder in the Cathedral* for a long time. Or rather I expect to see a long and dreary succession of *Murders in the Cathedral*, each less seriously undertaken than the last. As to lyric poetry, I am afraid that Palinurus was right. 'Poets arguing about

modern poetry : jackals snarling over a dried-up well.' Or again, 'They are like boys playing about on a billiard table who wonder what the cues and pockets are for'. It is true that Palinurus also says, 'Flaubert, Henry James, Proust, Joyce and Virginia Woolf have finished off the novel. Now all will have to be re-invented as from the beginning.' But it seems to me that this is a prose age because it requires us to be terribly explicit. And the serious possibilities of prose narrative have only just become known.

I expect no immediate evolution of the drama beyond the point reached by Claudel and no specific evolution of poetic drama beyond *The Tidings Brought to Mary*. This is Claudel's most wholly poetic play, the play in which he is closest to lyric. With *Murder in the Cathedral*, it has left a high-water mark around the walls of all our theatres. *Partage de Midi* is its antipodes.

Claudel married in 1905. The following year he completed this extraordinary hymn to an adulterous love. It is true that Mésa, in the last act, may be considered to be in a condition of delirium and that Ysé returns to him as from the dead. A stage-wind blows through her golden hair and white draperies in a manner likely to cause the death by chilling of any actress bold enough to undertake the part. This is '*le vent de la Mort*'. All the same, it is clear that in *Partage de Midi* Claudel is seriously propounding the gospel of all for love and that he identifies himself with Mésa's defiance of religion. There is no breakdown of faith. Mésa knows that he will be damned and rejoices. Mme. Claudel must have found this decision very gratifying after a year of married life. For, although the play appears to defy marriage, it is only the binding sacrament which it in fact throws off in order to find the love of a woman sufficient.

Gone, for the moment, are all symbolic resolutions, and what remains is simply the man himself, '*moi-même, la forte flamme fulminante, le grand mâle dans la gloire de Dieu, l'homme dans la splendeur de l'août*'.

Partage de Midi stands quite apart from the rest of Claudel's work.

Desire and penitence, treated from outside in *The Satin Slipper*, are here attacked from within. In *Partage de Midi*, Claudel is, for the first and only time since his first play, *inside* his medium, a position safely occupied by a novelist but fatal in the theatre. Psychologically, spiritually, from the point of view of its author, *Partage de Midi* is prose fiction.

It is normally impossible to procure a copy of *Partage de Midi*. Claudel has consistently refused to allow a public edition. The only copies I have myself had in my possession were an Italian translation and a very beautiful *exemplaire* of an edition, limited to a hundred copies, brought out in the summer of 1946 by the Swiss publisher Mermud. The reasons are clear enough. The play would scandalise the faithful and certainly find itself on the Index. It is also quintessentially a piece of autobiography, and its revelations, though charming and obliquely presented, are indiscreet. Marriage is a common and frequently a permanent cure for mysticism. Even so, *Partage de Midi* remains sufficiently tortured, sufficiently impure in its paganism, to have satisfied Claudel's spiritual directors that he was in no real danger. And he never attempted this kind of writing again.

The workings of his mind became more and more exteriorised. The only further hymn to physical desire is symbolic and in mime in the ballet *L'Homme et son désir*, written for Nijinsky,¹ with music by Milhaud, in 1917 at Rio de Janeiro. The volume, which contains Claudel's pantomime and ballet scenarios and which also contains *Christopher Columbus*, a highly insufficient successor to *The Satin Slipper*, more exteriorised, more miscellaneous, more dependent upon the use of a screen and of complex stage-machinery, a very handbook of theatrical device, is prefaced by a curious essay on Drama and Music originally delivered as a lecture at Yale University in 1930. In this essay, Claudel decisively hands over to music the function of rendering the sense of time in the theatre. Time is the natural ambience of the novel and of interiority of feeling. It is normally inconspicuous in the theatre except

¹ But in fact danced, in 1919, by Berlin and the Swedish Ballet, at the Théâtre des Champs-Elysée.

when the play is bad and we are thrown back into the sea of private anxieties. Recoiling from the interiority of *Partage de Midi*, Claudel recoiled also from any medium in which the passage of time is naturally expressed. Of an obsession with time, he has nevertheless given many indications, beginning with his first Bergsonian essays. Struggling to present a more than ordinarily acute sense of time in a timeless medium, Claudel produced masterpieces and, as a creative writer, dried up twenty years ago. For there is no question but that *The Satin Slipper* marks the culmination of his work and that *Christopher Columbus* and everything that has happened since, mainly in the way of lay sermons and occasional verses, exhibit a tedium of the spirit. Attempts to divert the common springs of art are fraught with dreadful consequences to the strongest and the best-protected minds.

